# DIVERS VANITIES

BY

ARTHUR MORRISON

W. H.
Station
Compton

DIVERS VANITIES

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

TALES OF MEAN STREETS

A CHILD OF THE JAGO

TO LONDON TOWN

CUNNING MURRELL

THE HOLE IN THE WALL

# DIVERS VANITIES

BY

ARTHUR MORRISON

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TO

MY WIFE

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# *CROSS-COVES*

*Frères humains qui après nous vivez,*
*N'ayez les cœurs contre nous endurcis,*
*Car, si pitié de nous pauvres avez,*
*Dieu en aura plus tôt de vous mercis.*
VILLON.

# CHANCE OF THE GAME

THE truly great man of business has no business hours. To lose an opportunity is no less than a crime, and an opportunity which displays itself in a time and place of relaxation is none the less an opportunity. It was for this reason that Spotto Bird found himself running his best in Bow Road.

Spotto Bird was not at all the sort of practitioner to use the Bow Road in the ordinary way of business; even as he ran in the dark streets, with more pressing matters to occupy his mind, he was conscious of some added shade of apprehension from the possibility, not merely of being caught, but of being caught working in the East End. But the clock was a red 'un, and the opportunity undoubted; to be pinched in the Bow Road merely might well imply loss of caste in the mob, but nobody need be ashamed to be pinched anywhere for a gold watch, after all. Not that Spotto

had the smallest intention of being pinched at all if his legs could save him.

As a rule he went West for purposes of business, and worked alone, like the superior high mobsman that he was. Theft from the person is a poor trade for the ordinary ill-dressed thief. It needs a scramble of three to get a watch, which will never bring them a sovereign, no matter how much it may have cost the loser in the game, and probably will bring no more than a few shillings. But a high mobsman like Spotto Bird, well dressed and presentable, who can work the West End and get a watch or a pin or the like by his sole skill, without vulgar violence, does better: his profits are undivided, and his prices are higher.

But now the occasion was exceptional. The end of an evening's relaxation at the Eastern Empire Music Hall found Spotto, near midnight, strolling along Bow Road. Something had been happening at the Bromley Vestry Hall, and a small crowd of most respectable elderly gentlemen — guardians, well-to-do tradesmen, or what not — was emerging from the doors and spreading across the

pavement. In the midst of this little press Spotto Bird found himself squeezed against a most rotund white waistcoat, in such wise that a thick gold watch-chain positively scarified his knuckles. From such a situation there could be but one issue. It was not a time for finesse; Spotto Bird hooked his fingers about the chain, tore away the lot, and drove out of the crowd with a burst.

He made across the broad road with a string of elderly gentlemen after him, and two policemen at the end of the string; for it chanced that the police-station was actually next door. He struck for the nearest turning, but was almost headed off. For a group of men on the other side of the way saw the chase start, and broke into a run. They missed him by a bare yard, and Spotto Bird turned into the dark by-street clear in front, but hard pressed.

It was a quiet street in ordinary, lined with decent small houses. Now it was empty and dark ahead, but loud with shouts and the beating of feet behind the runaway. Spotto Bird dropped the watch into his trousers pocket, and spread his legs for the best they could do. He led down the middle of the road-

way, partly because it was less hard and noisy than the pavement, and partly because there was thus more room to dodge any attempt to intercept him. Here he gained, and at the nearest corner there was a clear twenty yards behind him. Beyond this turning he went so well that he reached the next—which was very near—ere the head of the chase had well regained sight of him. Down this new street he ran alone, his eyes wide open for the next turn, or for some likely refuge or dodging-place; for the chase was too fast to last.

Among the houses on the left he saw a dark arch—doubtless the entrance to some lane or alley. He snatched at a lamp-post, swung round it, and darted into the archway. Within he found a paved yard, lighted by a dim light at the far end; and he saw at a glance that here was the end of his run. For this was a yard of old almshouses, and there was no way out but by the arch he had come in at.

The crowd was yelping at the street corner, and nearing the arch with every yelp. There was nothing for it but to lie low and let it rush past—if it would. Spotto Bird turned and sprang for the nearest doorway, with a design

to stand up close in the shadow in case the hunt turned into the yard. There was a little pent-roof over the door, and two brick steps at its foot. Stumbling on the steps, he reached to feel the dark door, and pitched forward with his hands on the mat; for indeed the door was wide open.

It seemed a stroke of luck, if only nobody had heard. He crept into the entry, rose gingerly to his feet on the mat, and listened. The shouts and the pelt of feet came up the street, and the clamour burst with a sudden distinctness through the archway.

''Ere! In 'ere!' came a few voices. And while some of the trampling went on up the street, part turned aside at the gate. Spotto silently pushed-to the door before him within two inches of the jamb, and peeped through the two inches.

Two or three of the pursuers appeared at the yard entrance and peered about them.

'Nobody 'ere,' said one. 'No,' said another, 'it 's only the alms'ouses; 'e wouldn't go there.' And they turned to rejoin the scurry.

It was a long, straggling crowd that still passed shouting up the street, as though all

Bow had turned out to the hunt. Probably the old gentlemen from the Vestry Hall were toiling at the tail, and as they could most readily recognise the fugitive it seemed well to keep back still a little longer. Spotto pulled the door wide, and as he did it a loud clang resounded from overhead. His start was merely momentary, however, for the stroke was followed by another and another, and he realised that somewhere in the dark above the almshouses a church clock was striking twelve. In some odd way it turned his thoughts toward the house he stood in. For the first time he peered backward along the tiny passage. It had seemed black enough from without, but now he could see that it bent by the stairs, and that the door of the back room, feebly lighted by a candle, stood open. He took a noiseless step or two down the passage, and saw that the candle stood on a deal table, in company with a little loaf or cake and a glass of beer. The room was quiet and tenantless; probably the resident was gossiping in another of the cottages. The beer looked very clear and pleasant, and a hard run, with the police close behind, induces a peculiar dryness of the throat

and tongue—a different and a worse dryness than that derived from a plain run with no police. Spotto Bird walked in and reached for the beer.

As he did so the little cake caught his eye. It was a pallid, doughy lump, with two sprawling capital letters impressed or scratched on its upper side—M. H. It seemed so odd that he paused with the glass in one hand and lifted the cake with the other. There were no more marks on it, and it was a dead, leaden mass, which nobody would dream of eating, Spotto judged, as he turned it over, at less than five shillings a bite. He put it down, and took the beer at a gulp. That was better.

He turned, with the glass still in his hand, and almost choked the beer up. For as he faced the door he saw that he was not alone—that he was trapped.

A girl emerged from behind the door, gazing straight in his face, and pushing to the door as she came.

'Oh then,' said the girl, 'it's—it's—there! it's true after all!' Her pale face was radiant, and she met him fearlessly, her hands stretched a little before her. 'It *is* true!'

'Oh yes,' replied Spotto Bird vaguely, 'it's quite true, o' course!' The shock was sudden, but presence of mind was a habit of his trade.

'Don't talk loud, or you'll wake mother. We mustn't wake mother, you know.'

Spotto Bird was relieved, though more than a little puzzled. In the first place he had never seen a girl exactly like this. She was pale beyond his experience, with a pallor that seemed unhealthy enough, though it was scarce the pallor of sickness. Moreover, she regarded him with an intensity of interest—even delighted interest—that he could not at all understand.

'No,' he mumbled: 'we mustn't wake mother, o' course'; and he furtively returned the glass to its place on the table.

'You must come and see her another day,' said the girl. 'I'll let you know when. When I've broke it to her a little, you know.'

'All right—I'll be sure to come,' replied Spotto, edging toward the door. 'I'll bear it in mind, particular.'

She laid a hand on his arm. 'You needn't *run* away,' she said, with a sudden archness. 'Why, I don't even know your name yet!'

Spotto was well resolved that she should

not learn it. 'Jenkins,' he replied glibly—'W. Jenkins.'

'Is it Wilfred?' she asked eagerly. 'I *do* love Wilfred!'

Spotto made it Wilfred readily, and shuffled a foot. But now this strange young person had put a hand on each of his arms, and stood between him and the door.

'*Do* tell me now, Wilfred,' she said: 'did you know you was coming here when you came out? Did you come all of your own accord or as if you were—a—sort of *drove*, you know?'

'Well, yes, I *was* sort of drove,' Spotto admitted candidly, wondering desperately what it all meant.

'You felt a sort of awful great influence that you couldn't stand up against—that drew you along?'

'Well, yes; there was a good deal of that in it too, no doubt.'

'And you didn't ever see me before, not in all your life, did you?'

'Well, no—not to say see you, exactly; not what you might call see you.'

'Oh, isn't it wonderful?'

'Reg'lar knock-out, I call it,' agreed Spotto fervently, with another uneasy glance at the door.

'I was frightened at first—quite awful frightened. That 's why I hid behind the door. And when I heard you comin' in, ever so softly, I was ready to faint. You see, I didn't know whether it might be really you, alive, or your ghost walking while you was asleep.'

('Mad,' thought Spotto Bird. 'Off her blooming onion. But all right—quite friendly.')

'But o' course when I see you really alive, and turning the cake and drinking the beer, just like they always do—why, I didn't mind so much.'

'That 's all right,' he answered. 'I 'm glad you didn't mind my 'avin' the beer.'

'Why, o' course not. That 's what I put it there for. They always do, you know.'

'Oh yes,' he assented hastily; 'they always do, o' course.'

'And it *isn't* Midsummer Eve, after all. And old Mrs. Crick was so positive it was, too!'

(Now the day just over was October the

thirty-first. Quite plainly the girl was balmy —balmy on the crumpet.)

'Was she, though?' Spotto answered aloud. 'Silly old geezer! I'll—I'll just go and tell 'er she was wrong.' And he made a more determined move toward the door.

But the pallid girl gripped him tighter, and pressed him back. 'Why, she's in bed long ago,' she said; 'you might know she would be. And so you know her, do you?'

Spotto was cautious. 'Well, only in a sort o' way,' he said. 'Not what you might call *know* her—not intimate.'

'I thought not, else I must ha' seen you in the yard. I'm always lookin' out o' window when mother's asleep, if I ain't readin'. Did you ever hear Mrs. Crick talking about this?'

'What?'

'Why, *this*, you know,'—with a nod at the table. 'She see her own husband that way, over fifty years ago, when it was all trees and green fields round here. On Midsummer Eve, she says; but Mrs. Nye says it ought to be twelve o'clock of All Hallows', and so it is, you see. I tried Midsummer Eve, and hid there behind the door till past three in the

mornin', and daylight, with the front door wide open, and nobody came at all. I had to shut the door then, o' course, else somebody would ha' seen it open.'

'Ah—jesso,' Spotto assented. A dim light was beginning to break on him. He remembered to have heard of some such thing as this years ago. Didn't the women call it the 'dumb-cake' or something of the sort?

'I was afraid perhaps it wasn't true after all,' the girl went on. 'But I said nothing to nobody, and I tried again to-night, as Mrs. Nye said it ought to be; and now I know it *is* true—true as gospel. I did it just as Mrs. Nye said—made the dough of plain flour seven nights before, unknown to anybody, and kept it under my pillow. And to-night I marked it with the first letters of my name, baked it, and put out the cloth and the candle and the glass of beer, and opened the doors and waited. And when the clock struck twelve in you came; and you lifted the cake in your hand and turned it, and you drank the beer—just the proper way!'

'So I did,' agreed Spotto Bird. The thing was clear enough now. This extraordinary

girl looked on him as her future husband, brought to her by this old woman's spell. Spotto Bird sadly wanted to laugh aloud. He had his own superstitions, like most of them that get a living 'on the cross.' A lucky penny, or a piece of coal in the pocket, or ceasing 'the game' for the day on meeting a squinting man — these things were reasonable enough; but as to this! . . . The whole adventure touched his sense of the comic, and he longed to get outside and laugh.

'So I did,' he said. 'But I'd better not stop now. Your mother'll be comin' down.'

'Oh no—she can't,' the girl explained. 'She's bed-rid—been bed-rid thirteen years. That's why I never go out, nor see anybody except Mrs. Nye and Mrs. Crick and the other old ladies in the yard. Mother won't even let me out of the house, and Mrs. Nye gets the things in for us. I ain't even got a proper hat! And I haven't been past the arch since I was twelve years old.'

'No?' replied Spotto wonderingly. 'Why not?'

'Mother won't let me. Says we'll go out together when she's better. She never will

be better, but we mustn't tell her so. If she loses sight of me for five minutes she almost has a fit. She hasn't anybody else in the world but me, you see, so I must do what I can. But I get very down sometimes, except for reading. Do you read *Home Slop*?'

Spotto Bird admitted that he didn't.

'It's full of such beautiful tales! Lovely tales! You ought to read them. Next time you come I'll lend you some back numbers.'

'Thanks,' Spotto answered hastily. 'I'll come and see about it. I'll bear it in mind,—and—and I'll just be gettin' along!'

The pallid girl looked at him reproachfully for a moment, and then dropped her gaze. 'Isn't there—anything—anything else you want to say to me?' she asked tremulously; and Spotto Bird felt desperately uncomfortable. 'Why,' she went on, 'you haven't even asked me my name yet!'

'Well, no,' he stammered, 'I didn't—you see—I didn't like to—bein' a bit—you know—a bit nervous; and—— Well, what's your name?'

'Martha Hardy,' she replied simply. 'But I don't like Martha—I'd like to be called

Melissa. Don't you think Melissa's a pretty name?'

Spotto Bird expressed unbounded admiration of both names; but was quite ready to agree that perhaps Melissa had a bit more style about it.

'So you'll call me Melissa, won't you, Wilfred?' she said, and watched his nod with wistful earnestness. 'It all seems—seems like a dream, don't it?'

'P'raps it is,' Spotto suggested sagely. He was now convinced that the sole expedient was to kiss the girl and get out on that. He had in general no greater objection to kissing a girl than any other young man of his age. But there was something odd about this girl: physically she repelled him, almost as a corpse would have done; and in other respects she left him puzzled, uncomfortable—somewhat abashed.

'Oh no, I hope it isn't,' the girl replied with seriousness. 'Don't you? We'll make sure of it, Wilfred. I'll give you a keepsake.' She pulled a little locket out of her pocket. 'I put it in my pocket in—in case,' she went on. 'It's a bit of my own hair in it—I put

it in a long time ago; just for—fancy, you know, to—to pretend to myself. But now it is all quite real, isn't it? And you'll wear it, won't you? Next your heart? It *is* gold.'

Well, a gold locket was something—even a little one like this. 'I'll bring you something next time I come,' he said. 'Next—next Thursday.'

There came a sudden thump on the floor above their heads, and three more after it, with the cry of a thin, peevish voice. Instantly the girl flung wide the door and called aloud, 'All right, mother, I'm coming!'

'You must go now,' she whispered hurriedly. 'But be sure to come on Thursday. Come at dusk, and I'll be waiting in the passage. Good-bye!'

Spotto Bird bent quickly and kissed the pallid girl, thinking, as he did it, of damp wax. Then he hastened into the yard, while the girl, summoned by more thumps, cried, 'I am coming, mother!' on the stairs. And the voice had a ring of novel gladness.

Spotto Bird made out through the archway with a broad grin. The street was empty and still enough now, and he caught again at the

friendly lamp-post and burst into a quiet fit of laughter. It was quite the most unprecedented go! So he laughed again, long and heartily, though with the quietness of cautious habit. Truly the rummiest start!

Presently he turned his attention to the spoils. It was a poor little locket—gold, no doubt, but with sides like paper. Nine carat, probably. The watch and chain was a different matter—thick and solid; nothing of nine carats there. Indeed, quite a good night's work, as regarded the clock and slang.

He put the watch away and turned the locket over in his hand. After all there was little enough in that, one way or another; and there are some things below a high mobsman's notice. To work in the East End might be well enough, for a gold watch. But a thing like this—well, a man of Spotto Bird's standing must have some self-respect. He turned back into the yard, dancing the locket in his half-closed hand. The cottage was shut close and dark now, and Spotto stooped over the brick steps and felt along the bottom of the door. The crack was a quarter of an inch wide, and more. He

pushed the locket through, and thrust it as far as it would go with the blade of his knife.

'P'raps she'll fancy it *was* a dream now,' thought Spotto Bird,—'a sleep-walking dream!'

## SPOTTO'S RECLAMATION

SPOTTO BIRD'S reclamation, like a number more of his adventures, came about through a watch.

It was at a period of some difficulty in Spotto's history. He had had a bad 'fall'—a stretch and a half; that is to say, in shameless English, he had been imprisoned for eighteen months; the most prolonged misfortune of the sort that had yet befallen him. Now, it is not well to begin 'the game' again too soon after such a release, and that for more than one reason. Firstly and obviously, of course, the police eye is upon you, and a fresh conviction just then is looked on with peculiar disfavour from the bench. But furthermore, eighteen months with hard labour (and for that term the living is as hard as the labour) has a ruinous effect on the professional abilities of so finished a fingersmith as Spotto Bird. Like the cultured quickness of the

boxer trained to the hour, like the lightning *riposte* of the fencing-master, and like the preternatural spurt of the nurtured runner, the dexterity of the master pickpocket is an artificial product, kept alive by daily practice, and vanishing utterly with a month's disuse. And even that is not all; the seclusion of a year and a half costs more than touch and training; the practitioner loses his accustomed nerve; he feels shy in the crowded streets, and desperately apprehensive of a thousand eyes.

So it came about that for some little while Spotto Bird did not 'go out.' In the common and ordinary sense of the term he went out frequently, it is true, but never in the restricted and recondite meaning of the term —to go in search of professional adventure. Funds sank low—very low. There was a half-sovereign gratuity on discharge from prison, but what was ten shillings to a man of Spotto's tastes and habits? There were also a few contributed half-crowns and crowns from friends, but a sporting attempt to found a financial start on these ended in disaster, through the pestilent prowess of the wrong

horse. And two of Spotto's most sympathetic and affluent friends were in trouble (trouble = prison) themselves. Spotto Bird was driven to begin the game again.

But it was not easy. On his very first outing he encountered a certain plain-clothes constable, well known to him and others in the trade as 'Ears.' This man's ears—they were huge ears, splayed outward—had won him promotion from the uniformed force; not so much because of their size as because of their quickness, whereby he had been enabled, unsuspected, to overhear conversations addressed from one cell to another, and so acquire information of much use.

No sooner had Spotto discovered a promising little crowd before a shop window—it was in Regent Street—than he became aware of the presence of 'Ears.' There the enemy lounged by the kerb, and Spotto, cold shivers running between his shoulder-blades, averted his face and slunk away, hoping—and he thought with reason—that he had not been observed.

He crossed the roadway, walked a little way down the less crowded side of the street,

and then recrossed close by the beginning of the Quadrant. One could always depend on finding just here, at a corner, a gaping knot of people, mostly well dressed, and always staring at photographs in a window. He knew the place of old, and judged it an easy spot to begin with; and, in fact, there were the photographs and there was the knot of people, absorbed and gaping as ever, as though they had never left the place since he saw it last. He crossed the pavement and joined the group. A sealskin hand-bag hung from a fat old lady's wrist at his right hand, and a man with a possible though somewhat doubtful breastpin stood on his left. The pin was too difficult—and uncertain as to quality; the hand-bag was better. But at that moment some instinct, some telepathic shiver in the back, induced him to look behind him, and there stood 'Ears' again, staring full at him!

There was no question, this time, of the detective having seen him. He was watching him, following him, without a doubt. Spotto Bird shifted uneasily from his place, and, hands deep in pockets—his own—made

an industrious pretence of great interest in a photograph of the Albert Memorial. Then he edged away round the corner and so down the turning, miserably conscious of being followed by 'Ears.' This is what is called in police courts being 'kept under observation,' and it is one of the discomforts of Spotto Bird's profession.

For the rest of the day Spotto avoided crowds, strove not to look behind him—though the temptation was sore—and did his best to impart an air of aimless innocence to his back view. All to little effect; for no sooner did he begin, next morning, to prospect afresh, than he perceived that 'Ears' was 'on' him again.

Spotto Bird's nerves began to suffer. 'Ears' seemed ever behind him, and Spotto wondered why in the world he had not rather been called 'Eyes.' It was a fact that the detective was keeping a particularly close watch on Spotto, and was asking questions about him of certain private informers, for he knew Spotto must soon begin business again; but it was also a fact that Spotto began to see the detective where no detective was, and that for Spotto

each successive crowd was fuller of ears and eyes than the last. Meanwhile 'Ears' had other business, and others to watch ; and there came two days when Spotto saw him in the flesh not at all, and even began to grow less and less convinced in fancy of his baleful proximity ; till, on the evening of the second day, things being very low indeed, Spotto Bird at last began work again.

He had come along Oxford Street, and he turned up the detached northern end of Regent Street on the chance of a meeting at either of the halls, since this was about the time at which such meetings began. St. George's Hall was shut and dark, but there *was* a meeting of some sort at Queen's Hall, a small crowd at the door, and cabs. Spotto was desperate. This absurd nervousness must be got over somehow, else starvation faced him—or even work. There were dark corners here and there, a crowd to hide in, and people everywhere. On the outskirts of the crowd, and near one of the dark corners, a man stood intently reading a newspaper by the light of a street lamp. He wore spectacles, and had ragged, hay-coloured whiskers and beard ; on

his head was a feeble-looking soft felt hat, of no particular shape, unless it were that of a pork pie in a saucer, and as he held the paper close before his face his arms parted his large cloak before him, revealing, in the light of the Queen's Hall lamps, a black watch-ribbon. Now it was Spotto's experience that a black watch-ribbon was commonly attached to one of two sorts of watches, either very expensive indeed, or very cheap. Perhaps the man did not look exactly the person to carry an expensive watch, but again experience told Spotto that this was a thing you never could tell. It was a good enough chance.

He glanced about him, and sidled toward the man, so as to give himself a wide field of observation to the left, in the direction of the crowd and the lights. First the ribbon, and then the bow of the watch passed between his forefinger and thumb, and so, with his little finger on the edge of the pocket, he lifted the prize deftly. The man stood still, with his spectacled eyes close on his paper.

The rest occurred in an instant, though it is slow to tell. As the watch left the pocket, Spotto felt the back smooth against his finger-

tip, and then was aware of a certain prominence about the edge. Surely this was a Waterbury! The suspicion put him to a shade of pause. It must be a tug and a bolt if the thing were worth it, and if it were not, then best let the watch slip back and try farther in the crowd. The moment's indecision, the unworkmanlike fumble did it. Down came hands and paper from the man's face, and Spotto's forearm was grabbed and held.

Spotto tugged and whimpered. In other circumstances, with his full nerve—before his eighteen months—he would have knocked the man over with his left. In his present state he whimpered and pulled.

'You lemme go—I got nothing o' yours—give a poor chap a chance, guv'nor—I 've done nothing, s'elp me! Let go!'

'It 's all right!' the stranger answered eagerly. 'I shan't charge you! You 're the very man I want to consult. It 's most fortunate for both of us, really! You 'll be quite safe, I tell you!'

Spotto ceased to pull, but continued to whine. 'It 's very 'ard when a man's 'ungry,

sir,' he pleaded, 'an' if you 'd bin through all what I 'ave, you 'd——'

'Yes, I know,' the stranger interrupted; 'that 's just what I want to hear about. You shall tell me. You 're quite safe, my friend, I assure you.'

Spotto took heart again. Perhaps there was more to be got out of this man than a white-metal watch after all, and by safer means. But at this moment a shadow fell on them from the direction of the hall lights, and behold—it was the shadow of 'Ears!'

''Ullo!' growled 'Ears,' with a fierce stare at Spotto; 'what 's this? What 's he been up to?'

'What do you mean?' retorted the man in the felt hat, dropping his hold of Spotto's arm. 'Who are you?'

'I 'm a p'lice officer,' answered 'Ears,' 'an' I want to know what this man 's been up to.'

'Oh, a police officer!' repeated the stranger, with no less sharpness. 'Then this is my friend, and he hasn't been up to anything!'

'Oh, you 're a pal of 'is, are you?' remarked the plain-clothes man, turning grimly on the man in the cloak. 'I 'll just bear you in mind

then, me fine feller! An' now you an' your pal had better clear out o' this, 'fore I make it too warm for you. Come now, just you pass along, smart!'

Spotto's new friend glared and bridled and began angry threats. But Spotto turned away with a humble 'All right, guv'nor, I'm off,' and the man in the cloak was fain to follow, anxious not to lose him.

'Go on now! Go on!' urged 'Ears,' sternly, with a rising inflection, standing erect on the footway to watch them off.

'And this is what you have to endure habitually, I have no doubt?' asked Spotto's companion, with indignation.

Spotto admitted that it had occurred before.

'It is an outrage upon sovereign humanity!' his friend exclaimed. And, in fact, it was not long ere Spotto discovered that Mr. Bullwinkle regarded 'humanity' as the one thing worshipful in the universe.

'I was going to the Queen's Hall,' he resumed presently, 'to the meeting of the Anti-Shampooing League. But this will be better, and the Anti-Shampooing principle is now firmly established—though I fear on mistaken

lines. Now, I want you to tell me all about your complaint—for of course it *is* a complaint. Crime, of course, is a disease. You have heard that before, I suppose?'

Spotto shook his head doubtfully. Crime as a disease was wholly a new notion. But if this old crackpot had any idea of dosing him—well, it only meant a bolt up the first turning.

'What! you have not heard that elementary truth? What is this talk of popular education? You can read and write, I suppose?'

Oh yes, Spotto could do both very well. Though he did not mention that it was nothing but a particularly dexterous piece of writing that first procured—— But that was an unpleasant memory.

'You can read and write, and yet have not learned that crime is merely a disease, a misfortune, to be pitied and treated lovingly! That is the fruit of this brutal system of law, and that benighted superstition called religion! Well, you must realise firmly that crime is a disease, and that I shall cure you—drive it out of you completely.'

Spotto looked a trifle askance at this promise.

But the street was dark, and his instructor went on.

'You must tell me your symptoms. My name is Bullwinkle—I am Mr. Samuel Bullwinkle. Of course you know that name?'

Spotto nearly ruined his chance. He hesitated, and began: 'Well, sir, I can't quite——'

'What?' cried the outraged theorist, stopping full in his walk. '*What?*'

And Spotto felt that if 'Ears' hove in sight now he would be given in charge on the spot. So he retrieved the error with native quickness. 'Did you say Daniel, sir?' he asked.

'No; Samuel—Samuel Bullwinkle.'

'Oh, Samuel! Why, of course, sir,—Mr. Samuel Bullwinkle! I thought you said Daniel. I never expected, of course—why—not the *great* Mr. Samuel Bullwinkle?'

'I am *the* Mr. Samuel Bullwinkle,' replied the other modestly, resuming his walk with stately gratification. 'And I am disposed to take an interest in you,' he added, after a pause. 'You must tell me your symptoms—your whole life. You must come and answer my questions—every day.'

Spotto ventured a dubious cough.

'I shall pay you, you know,' Mr. Bullwinkle pursued. 'I shall pay for the information—pay according to the quality and quantity of that information, of course.'

Spotto resolved that it should lack neither in quality nor quantity, if invention could help the matter.

'And I'll cure you into the bargain. I'll undertake to cure you of your disease—criminality.'

Spotto resolved that he might do his worst in that respect—at a reasonable price.

'Of course,' Mr. Bullwinkle resumed, stopping again with sudden concern, 'of course I take it you *are* an habitual criminal? This is not a mere first attempt, brought about by pressure of circumstances? You *said* something about being hungry, I think.'

Plainly, if there were to be money in this adventure Spotto must be as hardened a criminal as possible. He grinned quietly. 'Well,' he said, 'you see that split knew me well enough.'

'That split? Do you mean the detective?'

'Yes, the 'tec. I know him, too. Known him for years. I'm just out from eighteen

months 'ard, an' *'e* knows it. It's all right; 'twasn't no first attempt.'

'Very good, then. If it had been, the case would have been no good to me. I'd rather have charged you out of hand, and be done with it. Now I think we will begin to-morrow. I was so interested to discover you, that it never struck me that it would be late before we could reach home. I think I will get back to the meeting, after all. Just listen. You know now that it is a disease you are suffering from—this disease of criminality, for which the law has so brutally punished you. You know, also, that I am here to cure you of that disease. Here is half a crown and my card. Come to my house to-morrow at ten, and you shall have more.'

Half a crown was very little wool after so much cry, but Spotto Bird was a philosopher, and reflected that it was at least better than a clump of bony knuckles on his collar ('Ears' had enormous knuckles) and a charge at Marlborough Street in the morning. Moreover, there was more in it, it seemed, to-morrow, and perhaps more still afterward.

Thus began Spotto Bird's memorable

month of honesty, though it was scarcely that. Rather it was a month in which he abandoned irregular thieving for regular lying on the handsomest scale, at five shillings a day. For he found that the biggest lies were received with most favour, and he obliged his patron accordingly.

Mr. Bullwinkle lived in a very comfortable house at Highgate; and one of the first interesting things which Spotto ascertained about him was that his watch was a gold one after all. Truly Spotto's finger-tips must have grown sadly out of condition to have made the mistake they had.

Other facts about Mr. Bullwinkle were not to be so definitely stated, except that he was engaged on a voluminous work of philosophy, an incompendious compendium of the universe in the Bullwinkle interpretation, which remained incomplete by reason of the author's constant discovery or invention of new 'views' on many things. Religions of quaint design he had favoured and abolished one after another, and now would have none of them; food, clothes, and drinks of all sorts he extolled and execrated from day to day, forming

or joining leagues and associations right and left, and quarrelling with all of them in turn.

And it was here that, amid the multitude of Mr. Bullwinkle's principles, the one appeared which remained unchanging: since ever and persistently he proclaimed himself a man of peace, quarrelling unceasingly, with opportunity and with none; and, for a man of peace, taking the most absorbing interest in any sort of row of anybody else's. Also offering 'views' thereupon having nothing in common except this, that if the row were between his country and another, his country must be wrong, and if the row were between an honest man and a thief, then obviously the thief was a very ill-used person. Likewise, such was this peacemaker's sympathy with rows that if he found a policeman quelling one in the street he invariably took his number. The one crime he would never excuse, the sole sin he would proclaim the outcome of sheer depravity, was disagreement with himself. His published works were contained in a vast scrap-book, consisting of innumerable letters to the newspapers. He was ever sedulous to wash a white man black, and always ready to take the

breeks from a Highlander and make a silk purse from a sow's ear.

Mr. Bullwinkle's specific for Spotto's infirmity was nothing very novel after all. It was talk. He told Spotto his 'views' a great many times over at vast length every time. He impressed it on him, as a surprising discovery of his own, that it would be to the common advantage of humanity for everybody to abstain from crime, being confident that if everybody would remember that, coupled with the obvious fact that 'humanity' was everything topmost in creation, religion having been abolished by Mr. Bullwinkle, then crime would cease forthwith. Spotto Bird daily expressed a good deal of delight in the discovery and its corollary—quite five shillings' worth—and gratified his patron with astonishing tales of his own past misdeeds—at least ten shillings' worth, as he often reflected resentfully while Mr. Bullwinkle embodied them in interminable notes. For five shillings a day was wretched poor pay for a crook of Spotto Bird's habits: one, moreover, who was filling out the substance of a great philosophical work with so much wholly original information. But it was

worth while—for the time. It took him out of sight of the police, and, perhaps, gave them the impression that he was earning a living by regular work. Spotto did not realise how widely abroad Mr. Bullwinkle was spreading the tale of the lifelong criminal he was curing by his system of abstract secular morality, and of how he was thereby providing the final and conclusive proof that the systems of obsolete superstition which were called religions had no longer even the plea of social utility to excuse them.

The adventure lasted a month, and toward the end of the month Spotto grew restive. His habits were becoming too regular for his tastes, and his invention flagged. True, Mr. Bullwinkle was always ready with reminders and suggestions, and without his aid Spotto alone could never have compiled so black a record. Mr. Bullwinkle seemed to be familiar with more wickedness than Spotto had ever dreamed of, and some to which even that willing liar would not plead guilty, but preferred to fling in an extra burglary or so, and retain some shred of a pickpocket's self-respect. For there are degrees in everything, and

Spotto Bird was somewhat shocked at Mr. Bullwinkle's vile opinion of the humanity he worshipped.

So that Spotto was tired of Mr. Bullwinkle's secular morals, and began to regard that gentleman, as head and source of his daily round of ill-paid dissimulation, with intense dislike. Mr. Bullwinkle, on his part, either failing to suspect that a thief could also be a liar, or, more probably, not believing that any liar on earth could deceive him, regarded Spotto and his improvement with much complacency. And the fame of the unwitting Spotto expanded among them that reform, harangue, meddle, badger, nag, denounce, worry, and take measures. Here in Mr. Bullwinkle's hands lay the instrument which was to overthrow this and that, and in their place set up the newer that and the higher this; and great was the glory of Bullwinkle. As for the instrument, he remained internally sulky, though certain mysterious hints from his mentor awakened his curiosity, and even suggested hope of better things to come. For there was to be something new—a fresh regimen. The didactic treatment being com-

plete, they must proceed to the practical. So the month dragged to its end with such hopeful alleviation as this assurance could give it.

And on the Saturday of the last week Mr. Bullwinkle met Spotto at his front door with a beaming face.

'I have a pleasant announcement to make to you, Bird,' he said, as he stood in the hall; and Spotto's hopes rose high. 'To-day you begin the second stage of the treatment, which I have not yet described to you. Morally, you are regenerated, of course, and although I have not told you of it, your course of treatment has been anxiously followed by many friends, to whom I have reported it. In particular there is a gentleman who is now waiting in my study to see you, and it is with him that you complete your transformation by a course of severe manual work—digging. He has built a house, and the ground destined for the garden is now a bricky wilderness, which you are to break up and dig into a blooming garden. There will be a sort of high moral significance in the act, for which you will nevertheless be paid, though probably at a

lower rate than you have been receiving from me. The gentleman has been greatly struck by the triumph of my views, and——'

At this moment Mr. Bullwinkle was struck also. As he beamed on his convert, Spotto's eyes sought the black watch-ribbon, while his outraged soul rose insurgent within him. After this sickening month he was to be set to *work*—hard digging—for anything somebody might choose to pay! And there was the gold watch, that should have been his a month ago, flaunting before his eyes! Spotto let fly left and right together, the left on Mr. Bullwinkle's nose, the right on his watchguard. Spotto's benefactor went over with a crash, and Spotto sprang out at the door and down the street at his hardest, with the gold watch in his pocket at last.

## A 'DEAD 'UN'

BILLY WILKS was a person most uncommonly conscientious by nature and habit, and by trade a thief. He did not take to that trade by choice; no conscientious person would do it. There were several other things Billy Wilks would have liked better: a sleeping partnership in a large bank, for instance—or, in fact, a sleeping partnership in anything lucrative,—his conscience told him, would have been far preferable. But his finer aspirations were cruelly defeated by his fellow-men, who offered him no bank-partnerships, and refused in any way even to contribute to his bare support, except on conditions of intolerable personal exertion.

He had made his attempts, too. He had once been a time-keeper on building-works—a job which had attracted him by the comparatively passive nature of its duties. Here he had discovered a kindly means of increasing

the incomes of late-rising bricklayers, which brought him grateful acknowledgment, by way of weekly percentage, from the beneficiaries. But a misanthropic employer, abetted by a brutal system of law, brought the arrangement to a disastrous end. So that there was no more honest toil for Billy Wilks; but such was his regard for toil in the abstract that he still persevered in it vicariously through Mrs. Wilks, who did what charing she could get, with her husband's hearty approval. As for himself, he performed his thieving with the most respectable compunction. He never removed an unattended bag from a railway station, an overcoat from a neglected hat-stand, nor an armful of washing from a clothes-line, without sad pangs of commiseration for the despoiled owners; but then, as he always reflected, he had himself to think about.

It is surprising to consider what a number of things can be picked up casually in and about the streets of London by any conscientious seeker who gives his mind to the task; and that, too, with no such great risk. But the pursuit affords a poor living, or scarce one at all. The trifles are not always easy to sell,

and there is a sad lack of conscience among them that buy them; they pay in pence more often than in shillings, and in pounds almost never. It had never been Billy Wilks's fortune to touch gold in transactions with these persons, and, the aid of Mrs. Wilks's charing notwithstanding, there came a time when things were very tight indeed. It grew plain to Billy Wilks that he must venture a little beyond the comparatively safe limits which he had hitherto observed. Had such a thing been customary in the trade, he would have liked a sleeping partnership in a handsome burglary.

But active burglars do not give themselves to partnerships of that sort, and Billy Wilks's prejudice against risk deterred him from enterprise of too great boldness. He sought a middle way; he looked out for a 'dead 'un,'—one which he could have all to himself. A 'dead 'un,' it may be explained, is a furnished house left to take care of itself.

'Dead 'uns,' again, are surprisingly common about the suburbs of London, at all sorts of seasons of the year, and particularly in August; but all 'dead 'uns' are not equally convenient to work on, and Billy Wilks was some little

time in suiting himself. But when the approved specimen was found, as it was before very long, it was very convenient indeed, and not half an hour's walk from Billy Wilks's own home at Hoxton.

The 'dead 'un' was at Highbury, in fact, the end house of a row, with a railing before it and a garden wall to the side street. A wholly walled garden was opposite, so that observation was to be feared from nowhere but next door—a matter easily provided against. Blinds were down everywhere, and Billy spent a whole day, with judicious intervals of absence, in assuring himself that his 'dead 'un' was absolutely lifeless. Pebbles stealthily pitched at windows were his main test, though he had others.

It was a 'dead 'un' indeed, and a promising specimen. Not too large to be reasonably manageable, but large enough to promise profit; and the back of this sort of house was apt to be easy working. Billy Wilks left his prey to itself for the night, for he judged it best to get to work in the morning, and not too early; near midday, in fact. For, indeed, a 'dead 'un' is best worked by day if the thing be at all possible. There is no need for artificial

light, which may easily be seen through windows; also one can work more quickly and with less noise when all is plain to see, and at the same time a little noise by day is no such serious matter as by night, when the streets are still and the policeman listens. These small matters must ever be kept in mind by the conscientious parlour-jumper.

So that it was next morning, between the police beats in Cator's Rents, when Billy Wilks set out to tackle his job. He took a roundabout way, avoided spots where he might be recognised, loitered in side turnings, and finally neared the house at about twelve. The traffic of tradesmen's carts had quieted, leaving a favourable hour. He watched the leisurely policeman walk the length of the road, pause at the end to look about him, and turn the corner; and then Billy Wilks, his eyes all round his head, slunk through the front gate and made for a clump of shrubs that partly blocked the passage to the back garden.

Down among these shrubs he crouched, and peered back toward the road. His entry had been unobserved, so far as he could tell, but it were well to make certain. So there he

stooped and peeped till it was plain that nothing threatened him worse than pins and needles in the legs.

Thence behind the house his way was screened from all eyes, and at the back he found the most convenient of all back-doors—glazed, with a little square of red glass at each corner; tucked down, also, by the side of a flight of steps leading to the first floor, so as to be wholly invisible from the next house and garden.

He pulled out his knife, and, with a final glance about the neat little garden behind him, set to work to cut away the putty that fixed the little square of red glass nearest the lock. He was slow and awkward, and he hacked the woodwork clumsily, for in truth he was trembling as he worked. The moments seemed hours, his little stabs and gashes rang like hammer-strokes, and his hands weakened and quavered more and more. Worse than all, there grew upon him first the fancy and then the overpowering conviction that he was not alone: that he was watched from behind: that the watcher was nearing—was close at his back—standing over him. And yet he dared not look round.

He fumbled a little more, and stopped. He lifted his eyes to the main glass of the door, but it was a patterned ground glass, and reflected nothing at all; nothing of the staring, silent presence that he could feel behind him. And then as he peered he felt a breath—an actual, palpable breath on his neck.

The knife fell clattering, and with a gasp of agony he wrenched himself round and sank against the angle of the steps. A light breeze stirred the shrubs and the trees, but the garden stood empty and quiet as ever. It was fancy —mere nervous panic. He had been terrified by a breath of wind.

He wiped his face with his sleeve and reached for the knife. He was a little ashamed, but vastly more relieved. Nevertheless, when he set to work again, it was with his left side close against the door, and his back to the wall of the steps.

Now his hand was steadier, and soon he lifted out the little pane between knife-blade and thumb, and laid it gently on the ground. Was the key left in the lock? Yes, that pre- caution, invaluable to the housebreaker, had

been taken. The key turned easily enough, and nothing was left but a bolt—at the bottom. Some lucky chance—a breakage, or the neglect of a servant—had left the top bolt unfastened, and so Billy Wilks was spared the further agony of cutting out a pane at the upper corner. As for the bottom bolt, that gave no serious trouble. In the same pocket with a screw-driver and another tool or two, Billy had brought a james—a thing which only the flippant layman calls a jemmy—and with a hand and arm thrust well through the opening where the red glass had been, and the james in the hand, the bolt was easily tapped back and the door opened.

It was with a catch of the breath in the throat that Billy Wilks took a final survey of the garden and passed within the house. All was quiet. He closed the door behind him and stood, listening. The house was so still that tiny sounds were clear—the drip of water in a far cistern, and a little creeping click that might have been cockroaches in a near corner or a mouse high up in the building. No clock ticked; that meant that the place must have been untenanted for a week at least. This

was a thing that Billy Wilks had thought of, lying awake the night before.

Right and left lay kitchen and scullery; before him rose a flight of stairs; and as he tip-toed up these he saw that most of the room doors stood open. Now that he was alone in the quiet house, safe from external observation, he was easier and more confident; and yet, though it might have cost him a little more trouble, he could almost have wished that those doors had been shut. They were so uncommonly like great staring eyes; and when he banished that image it was only to make way for the fancy that the doors moved: moved by inches at the hands of invisible spies.

It even needed some resolution to force himself through the doorway that stood before him on the first landing. The room was the drawing-room, he judged, and most of the furniture was covered with drab wrappers. Venetian blinds were down at the windows, and he went across and peeped into the street. All was quiet there; a man went by on a bicycle, and an errand-boy dawdled past with a basket on his arm and his eyes on a penny

novel. For some strange reason the sight of the bicyclist and the errand-boy calmed and heartened Billy Wilks, and he turned to set about his business with no more delay.

There was an ormolu clock on the mantelpiece, but he preferred to take his first chance with more easily portable things. He pulled the wrappers from the furniture, and so uncovered a little glass show-table, with silver knick-knacks in it. A very gentle application of the james laid this open and splintered, and in four minutes the silver toys lay snug in his pockets. He might have felt a little remorseful at breaking this pretty furniture were it not for the reflection that people who would leave such a house unguarded must surely be insured against burglary. Moreover, he had himself to think about; and in view of that insurance he felt a moral—almost a legal—right to do as he pleased.

So he prised open the lid of a little escritoire without considering the polish, and began to open its inner drawers in the same way. He knew that there were often secret places in such things as this, as he stooped to peer into the cabinet-work; and with that his very soul

sprang up to his eyes and ears at a sound behind him : a gasp.

At the door by his elbow stood a man, open-mouthed and staring ; and Billy Wilks squealed and sprang like a frenzied rat. The iron james beat down into the staring face, and again and again. The man went over, and the iron beat into head and face as he went—the iron of itself, driven by some unseen power, and taking Billy Wilks's arm with it, as things happen in a nightmare. For Billy was nothing but a man in a devilish dream, with a staring, gurgling face just before his own, drabbling and spattering red under the iron.

Down went the face and down, till the infuriate iron beat it into the floor, and the remaining eye was blotted out and its stare was wholly gone, and the iron would lift no more. Billy Wilks, puling hysterically, rolled from off his victim and reached for the door-handle to pull himself up.

As he rose slowly to his feet, so the cloud of nightmare began to fall from his senses, slower still. He knew he had been struggling, fighting to the death, and not dreaming ; but it was with some unearthly thing, some hob-

goblin without a name; the Watcher unseen—the Presence that lurked behind the open door.

But there it lay now, a heap of tumbled, muddy clothes; and the face that had set him mad with terror—that staring head, was battered wide and shapeless and bloody. Billy Wilks's faculties were clearing fast. He reached out tentatively with his foot and pushed at the leg that lay uppermost. It slid limply off the other and lay like an empty rag. Billy Wilks leaned with his shoulder against the door's edge and laid his head against the door. He took three great heaving breaths and broke into a shaking fit of tears.

The thing was real: present. He had killed a man. The poor, hammered, smashed object at his feet had been a living, reasonable man a few minutes back, a better man than himself. And now—

Billy Wilks had never even knocked a man down before. He was no fighter. He could never have supposed that a man was killed so easily. Indeed, even now, with the evidence of his waking senses before him, he could scarce realise that he had done it. In a little

while his sobs subsided, and he found himself still leaning against the door edge and staring dully into space beyond the landing.

He shuddered and lifted his head; and before he could look about him there came, like a hurricane to blow him along, the impulse of self-preservation. He stumbled over the prostrate figure, across the landing and down the stairs. The back door, which he had shut, stood open. He ran toward it, but stopped short on the mat. The open world was worse than the shut house.

To escape, he must first think. A gardener's wheel-barrow stood near the door, with rakes and hoes in it. This was the explanation then. The jobbing gardener's half-day was due that afternoon, and the man had called to leave his tools on his way home to dinner. Doubtless he had tried the door—perhaps noticed the missing pane. Clearly the door should have been locked again. Oh, if the door had only been locked!

Billy Wilks closed it now, but still did not lock it. He went slowly upstairs again to the drawing-room. He found himself wondering, in a vague way, why he was not afraid to go

back there, as he would have expected. But, indeed, that now seemed to be the one room in the house he dared enter. To pass another of those doors—open and staring, or ajar and peeping—no. He stepped hurriedly over the dead man and peered once more between the sheets of a blind.

All was well; there was no curious knot of people staring at the house, no policeman in the front garden, as he had half expected to see. There had been no great noise, then—he had been wondering if there had been any noise. He recrossed the room, bending double again. That was because of the looking-glass over the mantelpiece.

There was a little blood on his hands—not much. He wiped it off carefully on the dead man's clothes. There was none on his own things, but he wiped his boots long and thoroughly on the thick carpet, in case he might have stepped heedlessly. So far instinct carried him, helped by a mere shadow of thought. And then he sat in a chair and wept again—more wildly and freely than before, rolling his head on his hands in anguish.

For now the panic, the numbness, the spurring of instinct were gone, and the sense of his crime fell on him like an avalanche. The man's wife and children were waiting for him—wondering why he was late at dinner. And here was the husband and father, beaten out of the shape of man, with not a feature they could know again. The murderer beat his hands on his head as he thought of it. He—he himself had made what lay before him of the face that the wife would kiss no more; had driven the life from the knee that the children would never climb again; from the hands that never more could feed them. This thing, this woe of orphan and widow, was what he had made of an honest man, a better man than himself.

Himself. Yes, he saw himself now for what he was; coward, thief, vermin. All his elaborate excuses to himself, all his conscientious scruples—mere fraud over fraud. He had never been honest even to himself, from his mother's knee. And here he stood at last, at the gallows foot. For it was that—that and no less; and the sooner the better. For to live and endure the agonies of the hunt, to

live in this remorse, and to be tracked down, nearer and nearer till the end: that were to make the gallows loom the blacker when he came to it, as come he must.

The way, then, was clear. An end of all. If he could not wipe out the past, could not cancel the horror of the hour now past his reach, he could at least give himself to just punishment—the punishment that there was no escaping. He would give himself over to the law and cut the ugly knot of his life.

He stood up, with a clear mind, and a strange, almost a pleasant, serenity of soul. But first the silver in his pockets. One sin, at least, was not beyond repair. He pulled the trinkets out one or two at a time, as they came, and piled them on the glass of the broken show-table, standing erect before the looking-glass to do it. Then he turned and stepped over the dead man for the last time, treading in the dry places; for now the thing repelled him as it had not done before. He went heavily down the stair, out into the garden, and so openly into the street.

The street was quiet as ever—he had chosen it for quietness. A boy, with hands in pockets,

went dancing and whistling away at the far end, and a man had humped his shoulders in a gateway to light his pipe. Billy Wilks turned the corner by the gate.

It was now for the first time that he thought of his wife. He would go home first to give her the few coppers in his pocket, and bid her good-bye—her and the child. There was a sudden, palpable blow at his heart as he remembered the child, a rise in his throat and a twitch at his mouth.

But he walked on, seeing little or nothing, falling, as he went, into something like a brown study, and taking his way by habit. One who knew the neighbourhood could approach Cator's Rents from behind, by paved alleys, dark archways, and paths between dead walls. It was Billy's custom, in fact, since he often had reasons for keeping his home-goings private and unobserved; and the last alley came out under the house he lived in, so that it was possible to enter by a little gate in the backyard fence. So by habit Billy Wilks followed these byways, and came at last to the ragged wooden gate.

He pushed it, but found an unaccustomed

resistance, and from between the pales came a yelp of childish laughter.

'Tan't tum in!' piped a small voice, and as Billy looked over the gate he saw the muddy little face of his child raised smiling toward his, and the familiar mop of ragged hair over it.

He reached and lifted the child in his arms. Nobody else was in the squalid yard, and Billy crept quietly in at the back door and gained his room on the first floor.

The child clung at his neck and patted his face with grimy little hands. Tears and dirt in successive smears were the daily cosmetic of little Billy's face, and to-day the mixture was thick and black, though now he smiled through it all. Billy put the child down on the tumbled bed, pitched his hat into a corner, and threw off his coat and waistcoat: habit again.

He remembered, now, that his wife had gone charing, and would not be back till evening. Well, it could very well wait till then.

The child scrambled off the bed and pulled open the door at the sound of footsteps descending from above. It was Nuke Fish, from the next floor.

'Cheer O!' said Nuke, as he passed the door, glancing at Billy Wilks's shirt and braces. 'Ain't seen you all day. On'y jist up?'

'Ah, yus,' Billy responded deliberately. 'I 've been 'avin' a turn in bed to-day.'

'Ah—I could do with a day in, meself. Missis out on a job?'

Billy nodded.

'Ah—she 's the sort. You can 'ave a bit of an 'oliday with a wife like 'er. So long!'

Billy Wilks pushed the door to, and took little Billy on his knee. He must think over that idea of going to the police; things began to seem different when he looked at little Billy. It was rather a piece of luck, Nuke Fish coming down like that, and assuming he was only just out of bed. It gave him time to think things over. More, Nuke would be able to swear he saw him getting up, or at any rate dressing, at—what was it? Two o'clock or so —if—yes. . . .

He leaned aside and looked out of window. A policeman was turning into the Rents at the far end. He knew the policeman very well, —this was his regular beat. Billy put the child down, pushed up the window, unbuttoned

his shirt, and leaned out, with his elbows on the sill. He yawned wide and long as the policeman drew near, stretched an arm in the air, and brought it back to the sill. The policeman looked up.

Billy nodded quickly. 'Good morning, sir,' he said cheerfully. . . .

After all, what was done was over, and at least one could refrain from making it worse. And when he considered little Billy——

Besides, a man had himself to think about.

So that Billy Wilks was hanged for quite another murder after all.

## THE DISORDER OF THE BATH

SNORKEY TIMMS is as disreputable an acquaintance as a man need seek, and full of the most ungenteel information.

It was from Snorkey's report that I was able long ago to tell the tale of the Red Cow Anarchist Group; and it was long after that time that I learned, by chance, that he had a surname at all. Not that he had been christened Snorkey; his original given name I cannot tell you now, and it is quite possible he has forgotten it himself; while even 'Timms' has so far gone out of use that you may shout it aloud without attracting Snorkey's notice.

It was Snorkey, furthermore, who told me the real story of the attempt on the Shah of Persia's jewelled hat in open London; as well as many others, more credible and less, of the doings of them that live by trades of no respectability. He told them behind bar-screens

and in remote snuggeries, not without interruption from thirst and its remedy.

'I s'pose,' said Snorkey thoughtfully, on one such occasion, 'I s'pose such a party as yourself might 'ave as much objections as what another party might 'ave, for to say what 'is line o' business might be?'

Such objections were familiar enough, for good reason, among Snorkey's acquaintance, and he plainly anticipated my reply. I signified my entire agreement with Snorkey's supposition.

'Um!' he answered, and meditatively licked the cigar by the gift whereof I had sought to avert the fumes of Snorkey's shag. 'Um—m—m!' He leaned back on the snuggery bench, put the cigar in his mouth, and reached for a light. 'You ain't one of our mob, any'ow,' he proceeded, 'an' I know you ain't a nark; I 'll give ye that much credit. But I *'ave* 'eard o' parties, same as it might be you, as is come down to the Ditch, or the Kate, or the Gun, same as you might be here, and got a-talkin' with other parties, same as it might be me, an' 'earin' about all sorts o' things, an' then writin' 'em in the papers, an'

gettin' paid for it—pecks o' money: about a bob a word. Gettin' it all out o' other parties, an' then smuggin' the makin's.'

'Disgraceful,' I said.

Snorkey pushed back a sadly damaged bowler hat and looked fixedly at me. Then he took a drink, wiped his mouth, tugged his grimy neckerchief with a hooked forefinger, and stared again at his cigar. I remained silent and contemplative.

'Not as you ain't bin pally, now an' then,' he resumed awkwardly, after a blank pause. 'Standin', an' all that; an' you greased my duke more 'n once; I 'll give ye that much credit.' And here Snorkey's speech tailed off into inarticulate mumblings.

'Out with it,' I said. 'You want something. What is it all about?'

'I'm a-savin' up a bit for a 'oliday in the country,' he answered sulkily, evading my eye.

'In the country?' I asked doubtfully; for the phrase is a euphemism for a convict prison.

'I mean the real country; not where the dawgs don't bite. I want a bit of a 'oliday.'

I judged that there must be some other

reason than that of health for this aspiration of Snorkey's, and I said so.

'Well, some parties mightn't call it reasons of 'ealth,' Snorkey answered. 'I should. Ginger Bates 'll be out in a day or two, an' Joe Kelly too—both together.'

I knew that Ginger Bates and Joe Kelly had experienced the misfortune, some months more than two years back, to be sentenced to three years' penal servitude. By the ordinary operation of the prison system, with prudence and good luck, they must soon be released. It seemed clear that Snorkey had some particularly good reason for not wishing to meet these old friends, fresh from their troubles.

'What's this, then?' I said. '*You* haven't been narking, have you?'

'Me? Narkin'?' Snorkey glared indignantly; and in fact the sin of the informer was the sole transgression of which I could never really have suspected him. 'No, I *ain't* bin narkin'. I ain't bin narkin', but I don't want to see Ginger Bates an' Joe Kelly when they come out—not both on 'em together, any'ow. After a week or two they 'll split out after other things, an' it won't matter so much; but when

they fust come out they'll be together, an' the fust thing they'll do, they'll ask after me. I don't want to be at 'ome just then.'

'Why?'

'I 'spec' they'll be angry. Matter o' perfessional jealousy.' Snorkey chuckled and winked. 'It was a bit of a lark, an' none so bad a click, neither—double event. But are you goin' to grease my duke?'

This rite—nothing more nor less than the passing over of a contribution to Snorkey's holiday fund—was accomplished with no more delay; and fresh interest was given to Snorkey's empty glass.

'It was none so bad a click,' repeated Snorkey: 'quite a lucky touch for a chap workin' alone, like me. It was when I came 'ome in that dossy knickerbocker suit.'

I had faint memories of cryptic 'chaff' directed at Snorkey by his intimates in the matter of a certain magnificent walking-suit, arrayed in which he was said to have dazzled Shoreditch at some indefinite period of his career. But I waited for explanations.

'Ginger Bates and Joe Kelly 'ad got their eye on a nice place in the country for a bust,'

Snorkey proceeded; meaning thereby that his two friends had in view a burglary at a country house. 'It was a nice medium sort o' place, not too big, but well worth doin', an' they got me to go down an' take the measure of it for a few days, them not wantin' to show theirselves in the neighbourhood, o' course. So they gives me a quid for exes, an' a few odd sheets o' glass in a glazier's frame with a lump o' putty an' a knife on it, an' I humps the lot and starts. O' course I was to take my whack when they 'd done the job. Nothin' better than the glazier caper, if you want to run the rule over a likely place. Buyin' bottles an' bones does pretty well sometimes, but you don't get the same chances.

'It was very nigh two hours' run out on the rattler, an' then a four-mile walk; very good weather, an' I put in a day or two doin' it easy in the sun.

'The 'ouse was a fust-rate place—quite nobby. I had a good look at it from outside the garden wall, an' I asked a few questions at the pub an' what not. After that I went in by the back way, with my glass on my back; an' I had luck straight away, for I see a pantry winder broke. So I 'ad a good look round

fust, an' then I went along, very 'umble an' civil to everybody, an' got the job to mend that winder. More luck.

'They let me do the winder—me offerin' to do it cheap,—an' so I sets to work steady enough, with a slavey comin' to pipe me round the corner every now an' then, to see I didn't pinch nothink. An' o' course I didn't. I behaved most industrious an' honest, an' you might ha' made a picture of me, facsimiliar, to go in front of a bloomin' tract, an' done it credit, too. But while the slavey was a-pipin' me, I was a-pipin' the pantry—what ho! I was a-pipin' the pantry with my little eye, and there was more bloomin' luck; for if ever I see a wedge-kip in all my nach'ral puff, I see one fine an' large under the shelf in that bloomin' pantry! The luck I 'ad all through that job was jist 'eavenly.'

Heavenly might not have been the appropriate word in the strictly moral view, but since by the 'wedge-kip' Snorkey indicated the plate-basket of the unsuspecting householder, I understood him well enough.

'It was jist 'eavenly. I never 'ad sich luck before nor since. So I finished the job very

slow, an' took my money very 'umble, an' a glass o' beer as they sent out for me, an' pratted away to the village an' sent off a little screeve by the post, for Ginger an' Joe to come along to-morrer night an' do the job peaceful an' pleasant. You see the new putty I 'd put in 'ud peel out on yer finger, an' it on'y meant takin' out the pane an' openin' the catch to do the job.

'Well, I put up cheap at the smallest pub, an' in the mornin' I went out for a walk. Bein' a glazier, ye see, 'twouldn't 'a' done for me not to go on the tramp like as if it was after a job. So off I went along the road, an' it was about the 'ottest stroll ever I took. It was a 'ot day, without any extrys, but you don't know what a 'ot day 's like till you 've tramped in it with the sun on yer back, an' two or three thicknesses o' winder-glass for it to shine through. I took the loneliest road out o' the village, not wantin' to be called on for another job, an' not wantin' to be seen more 'n I could 'elp. It was a 'orrid long lane, without a soul or a 'ouse on it for miles, an' I got 'alf frightened after a bit, thinkin' there never was goin' to be a pub. It seems un-

nach'ral an' weirdlike to be on a road with no pubs—the sort o' thing you dream about in nightmares.

'Well, I went along this 'ere lane with no turnin' till I was ready to drop, an' I could smell the putty a-frizzlin' in the frame be'ind me; me a-wonderin' whatever the lane was made for. Not for traffic, I reckon, for there was places with grass 'alf across it, an' other places where some ijiot 'ad chucked down long patches o' stones for to repair it, an' the stones was washed clean with years o' rain, but not a wheel-mark on 'em. I didn't know whether to turn back or go on, not knowin' which meant the longest job; till at last I b'lieve I'd 'a' ate the bloomin' putty off the frame, if I 'd 'ad anythink to drink with it. But even the ditch was a dry 'un, an' I was in that state o' roastin' torment, I almost think if there 'd been a pond or a river I 'd 'a' took a bath, I was that desp'rit.

'It was like that when I came to a pub at last. It wasn't much of a pub, bein' mostly pigsties, but it was good enough for me. There was beer there, an' bread an' cheese, so I sat on a bench under a tree in front, an' took

an hour or two's rest. An' the 'ole time not a thing or a livin' soul come past, except towards the end, an' then it was a van—a carryvan, ye know, sich as gipsies an' showmen 'as—a carryvan for livin' in, with muslin blinds an' a little chimney-pipe. It's a sort o' thing you gen'-rally see a purcession of together, but this was all alone. There was a steady-lookin' ol' bloke a-sittin' in front drivin', an' as the van came opposyte the pub there was a rare 'ullabaloo o' shoutin' inside it, but the ol' chap drivin' didn't take no notice. Then a bloke come flounderin' an' hollerin' out o' the back door, an' runs up alongside shoutin' to the ol' chap to stop, till he ketches 'im by the elbow, an' very nigh pulls 'im off the van. Then the ol' bloke looks round innocent as ye please, an' pulls up; an' it turns out that 'e was stone-deaf, an' what the other chap was after was to pull up 'ere an' get some water. 'E was a rare toff, this chap—knickerbocker suit an' eye-glass—quite a dook. It seemed this was 'is way o' takin' a quiet 'oliday, goin' round the country in a van. I 've 'eard of others doin' the same, since. Not altogether my idea of a 'oliday, but a sight better 'n 'umpin' a glazier's

frame for miles an' miles along a road with no pubs in it.

'Well, they goes an' fetches their water, an' a precious large lot they seemed to want. They brought it out in pails an' cans, an' poured it into somethink in the van, which made me s'pose they'd got a tank there. I might ha' gone an' 'ad a look, but I was sittin' nice an' comfortable under the tree an' didn't want to get up. So when they 'd got all the water they wanted, they started off again. It was a very tidy 'orse in front, but I 'd 'a' guessed the van was an old 'un, painted up. It was a good big long van, but the wheels was a-runnin' like the numbers on a clock—all V's an' X's.

'Soon after they went I began to think about movin' meself. At a place like that a visitor must 'a' bin a sort of event, even a glazier; an' I wanted to look as genuine as possible, so I guyed off the same way the van 'ad gone. I meant to slide off by a cross turn, or across the fields, an' get back to meet Bates an' Kelly by dark. But it was pretty open sort o' country, so I went a good bit o' way before I began to think about puttin' on the double. I come over a bit of a rise, which

was all loose stones with grass growin' atween 'em, an' was a-takin' a look round to find a easy way 'cross country, when I 'ears a most desp'rit sorrowful 'owl. I looks down the 'ill, an' there I see somethink a-movin' in the ditch, like a—like a—well, more like some sort of a bloomin' shell-fish than anythink else, or a tortoise—a tortoise more 'n a yard acrost. I took a step or two, an' there came another yell, an' I could see a man's 'ead stickin' out from under the shell, singin' out at the top of 'is shout. So I starts a trot, an' presently I see it was a sort of tin enamel thing the bloke was under, an' then—s'elp me!—s'elp me never! blimy if it wasn't the toff out o' the carryvan, stark naked as a little coopid, 'idin' under a bloomin' 'ip-bath—*you* know, yaller tin scoopy-shape thing—'idin' in the dry ditch under a 'ip bath, an' singin' out to me to 'urry up!

'So I 'urried up, an' 'is language was pretty sparky for a toff, an' no error. But when 'e told me what was up—larf! Lord! it was on'y 'cos I remembered the winder-glass be'ind me that I didn't go smack down on my back an' roll! Larf! S'elp me, I larfed till it 'urt me all over!

'"I 've fell through the bottom o' my van," sez 'e, "I 've fell through the bottom o' the dam' thing in my bath! An' my man 's as deaf as a post," sez 'e, "an' 'e 's gone on without me! An' I *couldn't* run after 'im over these 'ere dam' flints! Don't stand there laughin' like a maniac," sez 'e—"go an' stop 'im!"

'Well, I never 'ad such a paralysed, chronic fit in all my puff! I 'd 'a' give a tanner for a lamp-post to ketch 'old of an' 'ang on to, s'elp me! I jist 'owled an' staggered, an' the toff under the bath, 'is language got sparkier every second, till you 'd 'a' thought no patent enamel could 'a' stood the 'eat.

'"If you ain't as big a fool as you look," sez 'e, "go after that van an' earn a sovereign for yerself! I 'll give you a sovereign if you 'll lend me your coat an' fetch back that infernal van so that I can get at my clothes!"

'So I steadied a bit when 'e offered to spring a quid, an' I climbed out o' the slings o' the glass-frame, an' shoved it in the ditch. Then I pulls off my old coat, an' blimy, 'e snatches it as though it was jewelled sealskin, an' worth five 'undred quid; an' there wasn't

another soul in sight, neither, nor likely to be. An' then I 'oofs it off in my shirt-sleeves at a trot after the van.

'I dunno 'ow far I trotted 'fore I caught sight of it, but it pretty nigh knocked me out—what with runnin' an' sweatin' an' blowin', an' bustin' out a-larfin' 'tween whiles. The job seemed worth a good deal more 'n a quid, an' by the time I see the van in front I 'd made up my mind to try if I couldn't make it pay better.

'Well, I rounded a bend, an' there was the carryvan at last, goin' along easy as though nothink was wrong, an' I put on a extry spurt. It was no good a-callin' out, o' course; an' what was more, I didn't mean to do it. No; I legged it up be'ind the van, an' I jumped up on the footboard an' opened the door. It was a snug crib inside, an' I see the toff 'ad bin a-doin' 'isself proper. But the floor! It was two-penn'orth o' firewood, an' dear at that! Now it was broke, you could see it was wore thin as a match-box down the middle, an' pretty rotten for a man to stand on alone; but when it come to a man an' a bathful o' water together, joltin' down that stony 'ill—what ho!

'But I 'd got no time to waste on the busted floor. There was the fine new knickerbocker suit, an' a portmanter, an' a nobby kit-bag, an' fishin' rods, an' a photoin' camera. The portmanter was too big, so I slung the suit an' the camera into the kit-bag an' dropped out be'ind. The steady ol' dummy in front just went on like a stuck image. 'E 'd 'a doddered on through a bloomin' earthquake so long as it didn't knock 'im off 'is perch.

'I guyed it back round the bend an' opened the kit-bag. There was a tidy watch an' chain in the jacket, an' a sovereign-purse on the chain, with nine quid in it. So I got be'ind the 'edge, an' just wrung out o' my old clothes an' into the dossy knickerbockers in no time. Then I 'ung the old things on the 'edge, for anybody as might want 'em. I wanted the kit-bag for something else—'cos I 'd got a fresh idea. Some'ow a bit o' luck like that always gives me fresh ideas.

'I dotted back the way I'd come, meanin' to go wide round a field when I come to where I 'd left ol' cockalorum with the bath. But after a bit I topped a little rise, an' there I see 'im comin' along the road, 'alf a mile off!

There 'e was, all alone in the world, with my old coat tied round the middle of 'im an' the bath on 'is 'ead, 'oppin' along tender on a little strip o' grass by the road, like a cat on broken bottles atop of a garden wall! If on'y 'e'd 'a' 'ad the frame o' winder-glass on 'is back I could 'a' died 'appy, but 'e'd left that where I put it. Showed 'ow much 'e considered *my* interests, as was supposed to 'a' left it unpertected to do 'im a service! You wouldn't think a toff 'ud be so selfish.

'I 'ooked it through a gate an' waited be'ind a 'aystack while 'e went past, an' a precious while he was a-doin' it, too, gruntin' an' cussin' to 'isself; me, with 'is clothes on me, a-lookin' at 'im, an' 'im too wild an' too tender in the feet to notice anythink but the ground 'e was treadin' on. I was sorry for the pore bloke, o' course, but then a chap can't neglect business, can 'e? An', besides, I felt sure 'e'd find my ol' duds on the 'edge presently.

'So I guyed off as soon as I could to the place where I put in the pantry winder, an' I took the winder out again just after dusk an' did the show for 'alf the wedge in the kipsy—spoons an' forks in my pockets, an' the rest in

the kit-bag: all I could carry. That was my new idea, you see. Then I come through the shrubbery an' out the front way, an' at the gate I met the very slavey as was pipin' me while I put in the pantry winder! She looked pretty 'ard, so I puts on a voice like a markis, an' "Good evenin'!" I says, very sniffy an' condescendin' as I went past, and she says "Good evenin', sir," an' lets me go. Oh, I can do it sossy, I tell ye, when I 've got 'em on!

'I went all out for the station, an' caught a train snug. I see Ginger Bates an' Joe Kelly comin' off from the train as I got there; but I dodged 'em all right, an' did the wedge in next day for thirty quid an' twenty-five bob for the photo-camera—ought to 'a' bin more. An' so I pulled off a merry little double event. I never 'ad sich a day's luck as I 'ad that day, all through. It was 'eavenly!'

'And is that all you know of the affair?' I asked.

'All that 's to do with me,' replied the unblushing Snorkey. 'But the toff with the van, 'is troubles wasn't over. 'E was in the papers next day—locked up for 'ousebreakin'. It seems they missed the stuff out o' the plate-

basket soon after I 'd gone, an' the slavey that piped me goin' out gave a description o' me in the nobby tweed suit, an' somebody remembered seein' jist sich a bloke go past in a carryvan. It made a fetchin' novelty for the 'a'penny papers—"GENTLEMAN BURGLAR IN A TRAVELLING VAN," especially when 'e was found disguised as a glazier in my old clothes, an' 'is frame o' glass discovered concealed in a ditch. That did it pretty plain for 'im, you see. 'E 'd turned up first like a glazier, and reconnoitiered, an' then 'e 'd come dossed up to clear out the stuff. Plain enough. It was quite a catch for a bit, but it didn't last—the rozzers 'ad to let 'im go. But they didn't let Ginger Bates an' Joe Kelly go, though—not them. Them two unfort'nit spec'lators prowled about lookin' for me for some time, an' about twelve o'clock at night they sailed in to do the job without me. Well, you see, by then it was a bit late for *that* place. The people was up all night, listenin' for burglars everywhere, an' there was two policemen there on watch as well. So Ginger Bates and Joe Kelly was collared holus-bolus, an' thereby prevented raisin' unproper claims to stand in with what I 'd scraped up myself.

An' now they've bin wearin' knickerbockers theirselves for more'n two years, an' as soon as they've done their time—well, there's no knowin' but what they may make it a matter o' perfessional jealousy. What ho-o-o-o!'

# HIS TALE OF BRICKS

'MY luck again!' growled Snorkey Timms, elbowing out from the unclean crowd about the faro-table. The imperturbable Hebrew in the bowler hat who sat banker raked in Snorkey's shilling with a pile of others, and paid an infinitesimal selection into the half-dozen eager paws thrust in to receive.

'How much is that?' I asked.

'Thirteen bob altogether,' Snorkey answered ruefully; 'my very last blooming oat.'

'Well,' I remarked, 'you didn't come here to gamble, you know.'

In fact, Snorkey, having the entry to this particular Whitechapel faro-hole, had come merely to bring me. He was reminded, and across his eyes there fell that odd, blank, half-sulky look, with something honestly shame-faced about it, which I knew heralded an effort to 'tap' me.

'No,' he grumbled, 'it was to show you in;

an' it's cost me thirteen bob—me bringin' you 'ere.'

'It needn't have done,' I said; 'but I'm game to square it for you—when we're outside.'

Snorkey looked up quickly. 'Don't keep it till then,' he said; 'go an' pop it down for me. You'll change the luck.'

'Why?'

'You ain't ever played faro, 'ave ye?'

'Never.'

'Then you're bound to win. Ain't you ever noticed it, teachin' a bloke a game o' cards? 'E always wins off you. You go an' pop it down, like a pal.'

'Snorkey,' I said, 'after each shilling you put down and lost you called yourself several sorts of fool, and I never heard you tell such a lot of truth all at once before. You shan't say those things about me. Come to the bar and explain why you think I can guess the name of the next card better than you.'

The bar was made of two packing-cases with an old tablecloth nailed over them, and the sole bar-fitting was a cheap Shoreditch-made overmantel, which provided shelves for

a few whisky bottles. When you keep an unlicensed bar that the police may raid at any moment it is foolish to have more than a night's supply of liquor on the spot at one time. Snorkey turned from the crowd of arched backs and plunging arms that shut in the faro-table and we sat alone by the bar, drinking a far better whisky than one would expect to find in such a place, and contemplating so much of the world as we could see.

''Tain't a thing as you can argue out,' Snorkey observed presently, 'about a beginner winnin'. But you must 'a' noticed it. Though I must say it ain't the same in every game—games as isn't cards. I 've found that out, myself.'

'What games, for instance?'

'Well, all sorts. *You* know.'

I judged that Snorkey was thinking of the unlawful games whereby, for the most part, he made his living. It struck me, indeed, as a manifest thing that the practised burglar, for instance, must hold a great advantage over the novice, and I said something to that effect.

'Ah,' assented Snorkey, 'an' that stands to reason. 'Tain't bustin' an' screwin' only, either,

though that 's what you 'd think of fust, natural enough. It 's wonderful 'ow awk'ard a thing comes as you ain't used to—any simple thing. Peter-claimin', for one.'

Indeed, the particular form of enterprise to which Snorkey alluded would seem to offer no great technical difficulty, consisting, as it did and does, merely of the casual removal of unwatched bags and parcels from railway-stations and such places.

I replied with raillery. 'Surely *that* isn't a novelty for you ?' I said.

'P'raps, an' p'raps not,' he answered placidly. 'But the fust shot I made didn't come off very gay. It was on the strength o' that dossy knickerbocker suit I tried the game. You remember the knickerbocker suit ?'

I remembered it well. 'Go on,' I said, 'I know all about the suit. Tell me about the peter-claiming.'

Snorkey blew through his empty pipe, and I handed over my pouch. Then, his pipe filled and well alight, he began his story, to the accompaniment of the half-suppressed but unceasing clamour from the table across the room.

'Well, you see,' he said, 'I 'adn't bin doin' very well up to the time o' that little touch down in the country—come to that I don't seem ever to do very well, some'ow. But that little job put me to rights for a bit, an' what with the quids an' the dossy suit I was a dook for a month or two, I tell you.

'Up to then I'd been doin' pretty near whatever I could, mostly standin' in with others an' doin' the dirty work for a precious small corner o' the stuff. So now I thought 'ere was a good chance to go in on my own on the strength o' the new clobber, as soon as the plunder was melted. The clobber was a knickerbocker country suit—but I said that before, o' course—an' when I come to think over what line it 'ud do best for, I could see plain enough it was peter-claimin'. A toff in a dossy walkin' suit is right enough at the main railway-stations, but wouldn't look quite on the job anywhere else—not in London, I mean. An' the more luggage you can lay 'old of, why the more you look the part, you see. So I made up my mind to peter-claimin'. It always seemed a nice light branch, pretty easy an' safe, the way things is done at the railway-

stations, an' I 'd 'a' gone in at it before if it wasn't for wantin' the clothes. Now I 'd got 'em, an' I thought all the rest was easy as—as drinkin' another whisky.'

The illustration was facilitated by a second application at the bar, and Snorkey proceeded.

'Well, I just pratted round to Ikey Cohen—you know Ikey Cohen, don't you? It 's 'im as runs this 'ere show.'

'Oh,' I said, 'then it 's not the one they call the boss?'

''Im?' Snorkey answered, nodding toward a man in shirt-sleeves who was in direction of the establishment. 'Lord, no—not 'im. 'E 's the fancy proprietor put in to do 'is three months if the place is raided, at thirty bob a week for 'is missis while 'e 's in, an' fifty quid for 'isself when 'e comes out. Wish I 'd got 'is job at 'alf the money. No, it 's Ikey Cohen as runs this an' others like it. You know 'is place up in 'Oxton—I showed it to ye myself.'

I knew the place, indeed: a shop of old clothes, boots, bags, saddlery, cutlery—everything that is bought cheap in lots. But the

largest trade was transacted by a detached employé up a side court, and it was the buying of anything anybody might bring, at receiver's prices; for Ikey Cohen was the biggest fence in those parts.

'I went round to Ikey Cohen,' Snorkey proceeded, 'an' I borrowed a swag—a bag, you know. Ikey 's always game to lend you a bag, if you leave a bit on it and sell 'im whatever stuff you touch for, afterwards. There's some'll tell you about wonderful-made conjurin' bags with no bottoms to 'em, which a peter-hunter takes to the station an' jist drops casual over a bag a bit smaller, an' then lifts up the two, one inside the other, and walks off. That 's all rats. Sich things might 'a' bin made—I ain't sayin' they ain't bin, though I never see 'em—but they ain't the practical thing, an' machinery for these jobs is all my eye. No; all you want 's a sound leather bag—a kit-bag or a portmanter or what not—not too new; with a few bricks in it—locked. Then you pop it down among a 'eap o' luggage an' pick up another by mistake. If anybody spots you you apologise, an' get your own again an' 'ave another try; if they don't, off you go with

whatever luck you 've picked up ; easy enough —when you 're used to it.

'Well, I got a good bag from Ikey—left 'alf a quid on it. It was jist one of a job lot, shop-soiled, an' I would 'a' liked it a bit dirtier for a fust try, but it was pretty right, an' the others was much the same. So I pratted off an' whacked a dozen or fifteen bricks into it, locked it careful an' put the key in my pocket. You must always lock it—it might fly open in a crowd, an' bricks looks bad in a portmanter; besides, when you do the change it keeps the other bloke a bit longer before he tumbles to the game an' sings out —'e *may* think 'e 's makin' a bit on the swop!

'Well, I takes my bag o' bricks, an' jumps on a' bus in the Kingsland Road, an' gets off at the corner o' Liverpool Street. I thought I 'd try Liverpool Street fust because it struck me the stairs might make it a bit easier. You can nip up the stairs from the main-line platform, you see, an' get along the bridge to the other side by Bishopsgate, an' watch all the way if anybody 's after you. So I got off at Liverpool Street and walked down into the station.

'It may seem a bit tricky gettin' into a 'ouse at night, but I can tell you it's pretty nervous gettin' to work in a railway-station in broad day, if you ain't used to it. There's such a swarm o' people all over the shop, each with a 'ed on 'is shoulders an' two eyes in it, that you never know whether you're bein' piped or not, or who's doin' it. I walked about a bit in my nobby suit an' thick stockin's, with my bag o' bricks all so dossy, an' choked off 'alf a dozen porters as wanted to 'elp me; an' at last I see my chance. What ho!

'I see sich a chance as I never expected—a chance as you wouldn't see once in a 'undred times. For I come round from the main platform to the suburban, where there was a pretty good pile o' luggage stuck down opposyte the indicator-board; an' there, just at one side o' the pile, was a bag the very spit o' the one I was carryin'. A yeller leather bag with brass fittin's, just the same make an' size, an' just about as new as mine. So I whacked my bag down alongside of it and strolled off a few yards, casual.

'I 'adn't quite got practice yet, you see, to put one down an' grab the other all in a rush,

'cause that was a sort o' thing more easy to be spotted, an' I was feelin' more nervous than I ought, considerin'. So I jist turned about casual for a few yards, an' as I come back I ups with the bag I 'd 'ad my eye on, more casual than ever, lookin' careless the other way, an' 'ooked it off up the nearest flight o' stairs.

'I turned off along the big twisty foot-bridge toward the Bishopsgate part o' the station, an' I could see it was all serene be'ind me, down below. There was the other bag, an' nobody fussin' about it; so I began to feel quite comfortable. I come right out into the side bookin'-office all fair an' easy, an' it was all so very serene I thought I 'd 'ave a peep at what I 'd got, 'specially as there seemed nobody about in the bookin'-office, an' I couldn't think of any better place. I tried the bag in a quiet corner, an' it was locked. But the bag was so particular like mine I popped the key into the lock, an' sure enough it turned it.

'Well, when I piped what was inside that bag I was never so much ker-flummoxed in all my nach'ral puff. For, s'elp me never, it was bricks! Bricks, by the 'oly poker!

'I stood an' stared an' blinked, an' then it come to me sudden what a particular large fool I'd bin. I takes another good 'ard look at the bag, an' the more I looked at it the more I bloomin' well recognised it, an' the more partik'lar extry large-size fool I felt, for it struck me clear as mud I'd bin and pinched my own bag! You see I 'adn't 'ad it more 'n 'alf an hour, so it was pretty easy to make mistakes.

'"This is what comes o' bein' so flustered over a new job," I says to myself, "an' lookin' the other way when I picked up the bag; but p'raps it ain't too late to put it right now," I says. So I snaps the lock an' turns the key, an' hoofs it back double-quick over the long footbridge again. I took a liker over the railin' when I turned the corner, an' there I pipes the bag still all serene in the same place. So I went down the dancers double-quick, an' down I slaps my bag again alongside the other, an' swings out for another casual turn around.

'Things seemed right enough, an' nobody watchin', so I edged up careless once more an' grabbed the other bag—though I'm blessed if I could 'elp lookin' the other way

when I did it. 'Abits of innocence, I s'pose. Any'ow I made sure I'd got the right 'un this time, an' I swaggered up the dancers an' along the bridge like a bloomin' dook on 'is own estate. It was all serene again be'ind an' in front, but this time there was more people in the bookin'-office, so I went through an' out across the street an' into the private bar of a pub opposyte. There was nobody else there, so I ordered a drink an' then took a peep at my luck. This bag was locked too, but the key fitted—most all them keys fit all round—an' I took my peep.

'I took my peep an' I very near fainted on the spot. I did! S'elp me never, I nearly fainted! For it was bricks again! Bricks again, s'elp me bob!

'I felt I must be goin' balmy on the crumpet. I swallered my first drink an' 'ad a brandy, an' I wanted it. Then I 'ad another good look at the bag. Surely I 'adn't gone an' pinched my own again? I could 'a' swore—I could 'a' bet, in fact—that I shoved mine down on the right o' the other one, an' took this up from the left. I couldn't 'a' bin such a fool as to make the mistake twice, I thought. An' yet—an' yet—

yet, damn it all, the more I looked at this 'ere bag, the more I seemed to remember it. I took it up on my knees an' turned it over, an' the more I turned it over the more certain I felt that this was the bag I brought from Ikey Cohen's. At last I turned up the bottom, an' then I was sure, for there was a brass stud missin'. You know the brass studs they 'ave, at the corners, to take the wear? Well, one was gone, an' I remembered, now, that when Ikey pulled the bag down from the shelf over 'is 'ead, one o' the studs wasn't there. It was plain enough I *'ad* pinched my own bag now, any'ow. But what about the other? Surely I couldn't 'a' pinched the same bag twice? But then, what 'ud just such another bag o' bricks be doin' there?

'I felt like chuckin' up the 'ole thing an' goin' 'ome. But nobody likes bein' done, an' I wanted to see what it all meant. The thing sort of attracted me, if you understand, an' I think, some'ow, I *couldn't* 'a' kep' myself from goin' back to the station, an' lookin' for that other bag.

'So I locked up the bricks once more, an' went across. But the other bag was gone

clean now, an' there I stood where I began, after doin' two sep'rate clicks, with the same old bag o' bricks in my duke, an' two drinks be'ind on the transaction.

'What it all meant I couldn't guess, but I was beginnin' to get into practice by this, so I thought I'd see it through, an' try again. I give the suburban department a rest this time, for I piped a train comin' in on the main line, an' I could see a 'ole scuff o' people collectin' in the main-line bookin'-office, as though one was soon agoin' out. So I dotted round that way, an' saw there was a good deal o' luggage spread about on the floor, an' down beside it I whacks my old bag, not far from the entrance, an' strolled off to see what might 'appen.

'Well, I scarcely done it when there came the most surprisin' bit o' luck. The click jist did itself. A most astonishin' toff with a eye-glass—forty times as big a dook as me, an' I was dossy, as you know—this most rabunculous toff comes rushin' in from the platform, whacks down a bag alongside mine, an' calls a porter.

'"Portah!" says the toff, "call me a cab an'

put that bag on it"; an' 'e points with 'is stick.

'It seemed to me 'e pointed a bit careless, for the porter grabs *my* bag an' slings out with it to the cab, leavin' the toff's bag where 'e dropped it. What ho!

'I didn't waste no time—no good 'angin' back over a bit o' luck like that. I whacks my duke on to the toff's bag an' offs it into the station an' up the stairs again. There was no bloomin' error now, for this bag was twice as old as mine, an' 'ad straps round it. I was on the job this time, an' no mistake; an' safe enough, too, thinks I, 'cos even if the toff was standin' before me at that moment, 'e couldn't deny it was 'im as pointed the porter to the wrong bag. What was more, I was pretty sure it 'ud be a good click, judgin' from the style of the toff with the eye-glass. So I legs it out over the footbridge pretty sharp in case the toff should spot the mistake gettin' into the cab, an' at the Bishopsgate door I skipped into a shoful myself—a 'ansom, you know—and told the bloke to drive ahead up Shoreditch way; I guessed the toff wouldn't be goin' *that* way, any'ow.

'Well, I put the bag across my knee in the cab, an' took a look at the lock. It seemed a different sort o' one from the other, but it was a bit loose, an' presently I saw it was broke. So I unbuckled the straps very eager an' pulled the peter open.

'P'raps you won't believe what I'm goin' to tell you. I shouldn't blame you, for at first I didn't believe it myself—not when I see it with my own eyes I didn't. I rubbed my knuckles into 'em an' stared up at the sky an' the 'ouses, to make sure my little peepers was workin'. I looked at myself in the little bit o' lookin'-glass by the door, to make sure it really was me, as wide awake as usual. It *was* me, an' my eyes was open; an' there on my knees was the toff's bag, an'—strike me pink!—full o' bricks!

'Full o' bricks, I tell you, if I never speak another word!

'It was so much like ghosts it give me the jumps. Was I bein' 'aunted by livin' bricks, or was I goin' clean off my rocker? It wasn't my eyes wrong, any'ow, for I could feel the bricks, as well as see 'em. There couldn't be a bricklayin' competition anywhere down

the line, could there, that everybody was goin' to, with their own bricks?

'Anywhere in the next two hundred yards you might 'a' smashed that bloomin' cab, an' I shouldn't 'a' noticed it. What pulled me round at last was seein' Triggy Norton, stumpin' along in front on 'is little bandy legs, carryin' my bag—the one I 'd got from Ikey Cohen's! Leastways an hour ago I 'd 'a' swore to it, but now I didn't feel like bein' sure of anything except that it couldn't be anybody but Triggy with sich legs as them. So I stopped the cab when it caught 'im up, an' got out; but before I could say a word, "Ullo!" says Triggy, "you 've got my bag!"

'"An' you 've got mine!" says I.

'"Well, it ain't any catch," says Triggy, "it 's full o' bricks!"

'"Same to you," says I; "so 's yours—if it *is* yours. But I got it off a toff with a eye-glass."

'You see I could understand Triggy 'avin' a bag full o' bricks, though 'e wasn't a peter-hunter. His game was macin' the digs—takin' lodgin's on the strength of 'is luggage an' slidin' off with anything 'e might find. So

that a bag stuffed with bricks was just what 'e 'd 'ave, natural enough. But that didn't 'elp me. The toff that brought this bag an' rushed off with mine was no more like Triggy than your grandmother. Things was wilder than ever.

'"I don't know anything about a toff," says Triggy, "but I whacked that there bag down in Liverpool Street Station while I got a drink, an' when I come back it was gone an' this 'ere one left instead. I didn't mind much, bein' as I thought at first I was makin' something on the deal; any'ow this is a better bag, if it *is* full o' bricks."

'"Well I want it for Ikey Cohen," says I. An' then I looks up the street an' sees something. "Lumme!" I says, "'ere comes the toff with the eye-glass!"

'An' so 'e was—an' blow me silly if *he* 'adn't got my bag, too! An' lookin' black as thunder with it an' all!

'"Why that 's Jerry Wide, the peter-hunter!" says Triggy. "Don't you know Jerry? Hi Jerry! where are you off to?"

'The toff Jerry looks 'ard at me. "Who 's this?" he says.

'"Oh, it's all right," says Triggy, "only one o' the mob. I thought you knew Snorkey. What luck?"

'"Luck?" says Jerry Wide; "What luck? Why every dam' bag in Liverpool Street Station's full o' bricks, that's what luck! I never 'ad such a day in my life! 'Ullo," says he, pipin' the bag I'd got, "why *that's* one of 'em!"

'"Yes," says Triggy, "so's this!"

'"An' 'ere's another!" says Jerry Wide, pullin' up the one in 'is 'and. An' so we three stood a-starin' at each other.

'"Look 'ere," says Jerry presently, "we'll 'ave a drink on this, an' talk it over."

'So we did, an' then it got plainer. Jerry Wide got 'is bag from Ikey Cohen's too, out o' the same job lot as mine. He hikes it off to Liverpool Street an' there sees Triggy Norton's bag with nobody lookin' after it, so 'e works the change and guys off. Then up I comes an' does my little turn—twice over, like as I told you, with Ikey Cohen's two twin bags. An' Triggy, 'e comes out an' finds another bag where 'e left 'is, and toodles off with *that*. By this time Jerry Wide breaks open

Triggy's bag an' finds it full o' bricks, so back 'e comes to ring another change. 'E looks out an' sees me put down my bag in the bookin' office an'—what ho!—'e 's on it at once, doin' it so neat an' artistic with the porter an' all that I never dreamed it wasn't a mistake. His cab was ahead o' mine when he found what he 'd got, an' he met us as he was comin' back, mighty wild. An' so at last there we sat, the three of us in the pub over our bags o' bricks, an' swore between the drinks.'

'From all of which it seems to me,' I said, seeking to improve the occasion, 'that faro and peter-hunting don't pay you.'

'Never mind,' replied Snorkey the incorrigible, 'I 've 'ad my bit o' fun out o' both.'

In which remark I believe Snorkey told the secret of his choice—if it were a choice—of his profession : if you call it that.

# TEACHER AND TAUGHT

## I

SKIBBY LEGG tramped the darkening streets with a new hope in his little soul. It was a mean hope enough, as beseemed its source, for it was no more than the hope of safe employment as jackal of a bolder thief. He was going on a mission from one high mobsman to another, and in charge of stolen bank-notes.

Even such an employment had its drawbacks, it was true: something of risk, though small, something of uncertainty as to profit—though none that the profit would be small also. But the drawbacks were less than Skibby Legg could plainly see in any other mode of life possible for him. Theft, bold and large, called for skill and nerve, of which he had neither; and its risks were great. Theft small and feeble—common sneakery—whereby

he had sought to live, brought too little for the needs of a family, and still was often punished. While work was punishment itself, sure and certain. Withal he wished to feed his wife and children, for whom his natural affection was second only to that he bore himself.

He had taken his orders that evening at a 'house of call' in the northern confines of the Jago. There he had met, by appointment, one Fish, high-mobsman, welsher and broadsman, and was given his job. He was to carry the notes—eight of ten pounds each—to another high-mobsman, Flash Povey, at his lodgings at Dalston, and offer him the lot for fifty pounds. This was below the market price, for, in fact, any high mobsman could get nine pounds each for tenners got 'on the cross'; but Skibby Legg was to explain that Fish wanted the money that evening, and was in debt to the only fence immediately available. Consequently, if Povey had the money in hand, or could get it, he might make a handsome profit out of the transaction.

Legg's way lay across the Hackney Road and up Great Cambridge Street; and the streets were quieter and duller as he went,

following the lamplighter along the wide Queen's Road. Nine out of ten from the place he had left, given such a charge as his, would have forgotten the message long ere this, because of the more immediate interest excited by the effort to sell the notes on their own account. Skibby made this reflection with some internal pride in Fish's reliance on his integrity. But in truth he would never have dared to 'mace' the high-mobsman; and it was because Fish knew this that he had picked him for the job. Still, self-esteem is a luxury within the reach of the poorest in spirit, and Skibby Legg, who would gladly have stolen the money, but feared to do it, was as ready as any better-taught man to set his cowardice against his knavery and call the product a virtue.

As he went he fell a-wondering as to the man with whom he was to do business. The name of Flash Povey he knew well enough, but the man himself was a stranger. He was spoken of vaguely as a distant star in the upper ether of rascality, wholly out of sight from the nether slough wherein waded Skibby Legg and his like. Whispers of his exploits came

down the intervening mists, and it was said that such was his acuteness that he had never once suffered a conviction. Skibby wondered what sort of man he should meet, what manner of quarters he maintained, and what he offered his visitors to drink. If his reception seemed to warrant it, Skibby resolved to hint at a small commission on the bargain he was bringing, and so perchance draw a dividend at both ends.

He stood before the house at last—a most respectable house, stuccoed and semi-detached, with garden front and rear, in a short road of similar houses. A man who had been leaning against the railings of the house opposite, smoking a pipe, turned and strolled off along the road as Skibby went in at the gate.

His knock was answered quickly, for a servant was lighting the gas behind the door. Legg gave himself no more identity than that he was 'from Mr. Fish,' and as the girl took the words he was conscious of some passing presence of faded alpaca beyond the stairs, where the landlady made momentary observation. He saw no more of her, however, for

the servant, with a prudent regard to his appearance, shut the door in Skibby's face while she carried his message.

The door reopened in a very few seconds, and Mr. Fish's deputy was shown his way up the stairs, darkening as they rose. In the first-floor front room, lighted by nothing but the dull fire in the grate and the last dusk glimpse through the window, he sat to wait; and again it was not for long.

For as he sat staring at the fire he started at a sudden barking cough by his ear, and in the moment was conscious of a light behind him. He turned and encountered a face, set as it were in the light of a candle that left the rest of the room in a gloom almost as deep as ever. It was a clear-skinned, waxen face—rather as if the wax were gone a little shiny in the heat of the candle; and the hollow of each cheek had a red spot like a dab of raddle. There was a set grin on this face—an uncomfortable grin that might mean forced affability or native malignity, and Skibby could not tell which. And withal he somehow remembered the face—had known it well, he felt sure, in its rounder and healthier days.

'Good evening,' said Skibby Legg; and then, 'sir.' That stare through that grin made a man uncomfortable.

'Good evening, Skibby Legg.'

Now he knew. He had been wondering, but the voice—the voice pronouncing his name—brought much to his memory, and he knew. Flash Povey had begun life under another name, and Skibby Legg had started him. As a boy he had been lob-crawler and parlour-jumper for Skibby, who had waited by shop doors while his junior crept on hands and knees toward tills, and who had bunked him into open windows to bring out anything he could find, and get whatever his principal chose to give him for his trouble. It was a division of labour—and profits—which suited Skibby's temperament; and he had been sorry when misfortune—to the boy—separated them. And now his pupil, a grown man, had reached the top of the tree. It was wonderful how some chaps got on.

'Why, Cooper!—Ned Cooper!' exclaimed Legg.

The grin widened, and now Skibby saw it had nothing of affability in it at all.

'I think you'd better forget that name, Skibby Legg. I don't want to hear it. What have you come for?'

Of course, Skibby reflected, the gentleman would not like his real name mentioned. He apologised, a little awkwardly, and just as awkwardly brought out his message from Fish. For Povey had lit another candle, and having put the two on the table by his side, now sat with his sharp face thrust forward, his grin unabated, listening to the end without a sound, save now and again the hard little cough that sounded like a jeer.

Legg finished, and there was a short pause. Then Povey, never moving his eyes, so hard and glassy, from Legg's, put out his hand and said: 'Give me the notes.'

Skibby took the little bundle from his inner pocket, opened it out, and put it into the outstretched hand. Then at last the uncomfortable eyes shifted, and Flash Povey turned the eight notes over and examined them one after another. This done, he took them up in a sheaf, put a corner of it into the flame of the nearest candle, dropped the blazing paper on the fire, and thrust it well in with the poker.

'There go your eight tenners, Mr. Skibby Legg,' said Flash Povey.

The unhappy messenger clutched the chair under him with both hands, and sweat broke out on his face. 'G—g—glor! They ain't mine!' was all he could gasp.

'Yours or Fish's or the Mogul's, it's all the same now,' retorted Flash Povey, taking a large shiny revolver from his pocket and laying it on the table by his side. 'It's a clumsy plant, though I didn't expect much better from that mob.'

Skibby Legg sat bewildered, turning his eyes from the glassy gaze of Flash Povey to the pistol on the table, and back again—always back again to Povey's eyes. What the man meant Legg could not guess. The Mogul was a name he had heard as he had heard Povey's—coming as an echo from above. The Mogul was not a gonoph—a thief—in the common sense, but a speculator in theft; a designer of scoundrelism, a backer of scoundrels, a financier of large fraud; the head, or thereabouts, of the whole trade, and as safe from the police as any man in London. So much Skibby knew, but the rest of Flash

Povey's meaning was beyond his guess. He stammered some words of desperate protest, but Povey cut him short.

'You can't kid me like that,' said the grinning phthisic. 'I expected something of the sort, but I thought it 'ud be a trifle cleverer.' He had the pistol in his hand now, and Legg's distress was that he could not watch that and the man's eyes at the same time. 'At any rate *you* don't expect to kid me, do you?'

Skibby Legg managed to stutter that he didn't know nothing about it, s'elp him.

'Know nothing? Pah! They were eight notes from the Phœnix Hotel job, an' the woodenheadest rozzer in London knows the numbers by heart. I was to go out an' be pinched at the front gate with 'em on me, an' get a lagging. It 'ud suit the Mogul to put me away for a few years, an' there's been a nark of his piping the house all day. Does he think I'm a baby? Eh?' The red spots on Povey's face stood now like blood-gouts on a corpse, and his grin was ghastly. 'But you needn't bother about it—you're not going back to him!'

Skibby Legg's gaze left Povey's eyes from

that moment, and fixed instead on the little steel circle that was thrust so close before them that they seemed to cross in a terrified squint. For some while now he saw no eye but the foremost eye of the pistol, and the little group of dimmer eyes that lurked behind that. But he heard Povey's voice, and the words seemed to come beating on the crown of his head.

'No, Skibby Legg, you 're not going back. I 'm going to die myself before very long, they say; but you 're going to die first. That 's what they counted on—I 'd get sentenced for the notes, and my light 'ud go out in the jug. But I want the rest of my life out of stir, you see. I 'll have it so; and so will you, for you are going to die in five minutes. Eh?'

The words beat on the crown of Skibby's head, and some solid thing rose and swelled in his chest till it stopped at his throat and began to choke him. Povey went on.

'I meant to have had a talk to you before, but I 've been too busy. I might never have found the time—I might never have found you—if you hadn't come to me yourself, and brought me this other little bill to settle. For there was one owing already—oh yes! You

wouldn't understand, perhaps. You look up to me, Skibby Legg—you call me "sir." Envious of me, Skibby Legg? Proud of your scholar? Outside they will tell you I have never been convicted. You know a little better, but it's very nearly true. I make yellow quids at the game while you can't make brown ha'pennies. You put me on to that game, and perhaps you think I owe you a turn for it! Yes, I do, and you shall have it, Skibby Legg! You shall have it! You took me in hand—a boy that might have been anything—and you showed me an easier game than hard work. You showed me the trick, and you took what it fetched, till the day I was collared in that area, and then you bolted and left me. I got my first conviction for that—my only dose, but it was enough. There was only one way for me after that, and I took it, and here I am. Here I am, and you envy me; I have done so well that I ought to be grateful, eh? Eh? If you had cut my throat you would have got the rope round your neck; but you taught me to dip the lob, and you won't understand when I tell you how grateful I am. Grateful as the hangman's rope, Skibby Legg!

And now you come to get me my second conviction, and I really can't let my account run any longer. You 'd have done better to have cut my throat, Skibby Legg, when you might have done it. The hangman might not have got you, but nothing can save you from me!'

Skibby Legg's mouth opened, but there came no sound but a dry choke. His hands lost their hold of the chair frame beneath him, and wandered weakly in space. The steel eye came nearer till he saw it no more, but suddenly felt it, cold and small, on his forehead.

His hands wandered, and his mouth opened. In intent he was pleading, begging his life, but he heard no sound from his own lips.

'Cool against the forehead, isn't it? It won't last long. A little sickish? A little sickish, Skibby Legg? Of course: you 're dying, you know. Usual to feel a little sickish. It 'll be all over presently—when I pull the trigger. You 're nearly through it—all but that; just the crash. Only the crash, and it 's over. You are dying—dying——'

Skibby Legg rose three inches in his chair and fell back, with a faint pule in his throat. His senses shrank to one, through which

nothing reached him but a roaring as of a great sea. . . . And then——

Flash Povey coughed, and put the pistol back on the table; and presently Legg could see him again, his wolfish grin persisting, his glassy eyes unmoving in their dark pits, his hands resting on his thin knees.

'Speaking of the crash reminded me,' he said. 'The noise would be very inconvenient. They would come in and find your carcass—and find me. Wouldn't do. Besides, my landlady is a very respectable woman—wholly unconnected with the trade you taught me—and it would be bad for her; bad for her carpet, too, and the ceiling underneath. No—I shan't do it. You 've died already, as far as your feelings go; all but the crash, as I said—the easiest part of it. As for the rest—I really believe it 'll hurt you a deal more in the long-run to let you live. You 've a deal to go through, Skibby Legg, in your way of life, and you 'll have to die again at the end of it. Yes—I 'll think over the question of letting you live a bit. Drink this—it 's brandy.'

Flash Povey thrust the edge of the glass between Legg's shaking jaws, and tilted it.

Legg swallowed greedily, and then sat, a limp heap, staring before him. Presently he caught his breath sharply, and began to sob. Then he dropped his face on his hands, and burst into tears.

For a little while Povey watched him, grinning and coughing by turns. Then he rose and shook Legg by the shoulder. 'This won't do,' he said. 'Get up, and come for a walk. Take some more brandy if you want it; but pull yourself together till I turn you off the premises.'

Skibby Legg looked up and began: 'S'elp me, sir, I never——'

But Povey cut him short. 'Drink the brandy, and then shut your mouth,' he said. 'You 've made all the noise I want in my place already.'

Legg took the glass with a feeble hand, and emptied it at a gulp. Povey took him by the arm.

'Come,' he said, 'you 're a stronger man than I am: stand up and walk. I 'm not going out by the front, where your friends are waiting; there 's another way.'

They went down the stairs, out at the back,

and across the little garden to a door in the farther wall. This passed and closed, they stood in a footway with garden walls on each side.

'I'm just going to see you safe away from your pals,' Povey said quietly. 'Don't forget I've got the revolver with me; remember it if you're tempted to try bolting, or shouting, or anything of that sort. That way.'

He pushed Legg before him to the end of the passage, and then walked by his side through a succession of back streets. The brandy had revived Skibby Legg, and the night air calmed his nerves. He began to speak.

'I never wanted to nark you, sir,' he protested. 'S'elp me, I on'y come with the message from Fish! I don't know nothin' about——'

'You needn't talk,' Povey interrupted 'Anything you say's more likely to be a lie than not, even if it's probable; and that isn't probable.'

They went between posts set in a narrow passage, and down a few steps to a canal towpath. This way was often used in daylight by foot-passengers as a short cut, but now it lay dark and empty.

'Skibby Legg,' said Povey, 'there 's the water. Wouldn't you rather end it all there? I should if I were you.'

Legg backed away quickly from the edge. 'No, sir,' he whined, 'no—don't begin on me again, sir! S'elp me, I thought I was doin' you a turn—I did!'

The pistol was shining faintly in Povey's right hand, and he took a hold of Legg's coat with the left. 'Don't try to break away or call out,' he said softly, 'or it 'll come quicker. I think I may as well finish now; it was only for my own convenience that I put it off before.' The pistol crept toward Legg's face as Povey spoke. 'There 's no reason why I shouldn't do it here now, and I think I will.'

The revolver tapped Legg's forehead twice, and Povey's face was demoniac behind it. 'Now, Skibby Legg, Skibby Legg,' he said, 'what time shall I give you? It 's now, Skibby Legg, now!'

Legg pulled feebly, and pleaded, now, with a voice of broken whispers. 'Not now! Oh, not now! Not to-night! I 'll do anything! Let me go—let me go to my children!'

Povey withdrew his pistol a little way, and

his grin grew more thoughtful. 'Children?' he said. 'So you've got children? I hope you're bringing them up as you did me! You shall go to them—for to-night, at any rate. Teach them to dip the lob! Go to them to-night, and I'll watch you home. I'll not lose track of you, Skibby Legg!'

## II

Skibby Legg's wife was perplexed by an odd change. Hitherto, whatever his failure in other respects, her husband had eaten and slept as well as any man. Now he woke at night in fits of crying, clutching at her and pleading incoherently for his life; and he lay in a tremble for an hour after each fit. At daytime he skulked at home. She had known him do this before; but he had never before failed to eat the most of whatever meal their doubtful resources might provide, and now he scarce ate at all. He drank, however, whenever he could get the means or the invitation. Like many weak men, he had been something of a tyrant at home, and now he would make no clear explanation of his trouble, and resented questions. She saw him once, as she went

about her search for charing, with a well-dressed man, hectic, hollow-eyed, and coughing; and when she mentioned the fact later, and asked questions, he was first angry and then tearful, but he would tell her nothing.

A little after this he 'got into trouble,' which meant that he had six months' imprisonment for a bungled theft at a shop-door. And though the six months was a sore time of struggle and privation for Mrs. Legg, she was rewarded to see her husband emerge a sounder man than he went in. He slept now, and could eat.

It was a little after his release that a friend proposed to him a joint enterprise in blue pigeon flying. Blue pigeon flying is no matter for the bird-fancier, but consists in the ripping out and carrying away of lead sheeting and pipes from empty houses. Carefully done, it is regarded as a safe branch of the game; and if two work together, at a suitable place, they can make it pay fairly well. In this case the place was a rat-riddled warehouse on the borders of Homerton Marsh—a place that would seem, at first glance, to have been stripped long ago. But Bob Wickens had

looked farther, and reported that there was not only blue pigeon in plenty, but brass taps and gas-fittings. You might go to and fro half a dozen times, he said, and do well at every journey. He and Skibby Legg, as a matter of fact, only went once, and what happened on that occasion Bob Wickens confided to Snorkey Timms, after an inquest at which Bob had been a witness.

'O' course,' said Bob, 'I didn't say where I 'd bin, nor what I 'd bin doin'. 'Tain't likely, even if they 'd wanted it. But as a matter o' fact me an' Skibby 'ad bin along to that old ware'us there by the marsh, after blue stuff. 'E was balmy—no doubt about that, an' I shouldn't 'a' 'ad 'im in it if I 'd rumbled it soon enough, but I didn't. He seemed all right, goin' along. But 'e 'd just 'ad six months, and p'raps that upset 'im. Anyway 'e was off 'is 'ead—that I *do* know. There was a wall with a gate in it, but I 'd readied the gate the night afore, an' we was inside in a jiff. It was daytime, o' course—afternoon. It wouldn't 'a' done to go about a place like that with a light at night-time—you 'd 'a' 'ad the whole parish a-starin'. We climbed in

at a winder—there was thick bars, but on'y screwed in.

'Well, as soon as we was inside, Skibby gives a jump. '"What's that noise?" says 'e.

'"Rats," I says. "The place is alive with 'em." An' so it was. When I first went to take a look at it I see 'em an' 'eard 'em everywhere—they very nigh jumped on me.

'"Oh," says Skibby, starin' dull an' rum in the eyes. "Rats, is it? All right, if it's on'y rats."

'So we legged it up the dancers, 'cos the stuff was on the top floor an' the roof. Skibby was all jumpy, an' the farther up we went the jumpier 'e got. 'E backed away sudden from every door, an' every now an' then 'e turned round an' looked 'ard down the stairs.

'"What's up with you?" I says.

'"I don't like this place," says Skibby; "it's full o'—full o' rats; and noises."

'It's a fact there *was* noises, but it was what the rats made; they was everywhere. But a rum thing I did notice when we got near the top was that some o' the rats began to foller us. Not snappish, nor anything like that, you understand, but just trottin' up close

behind like tame 'uns—or more like frightened 'uns, if you understand. Like a little dawg as gets close behind 'is master when 'e sees a big dawg comin'. But Skibby, 'e never seemed to notice 'em, but kep' on starin' wide all round 'im, like as if 'e was afraid o' some one poppin' out at 'im.

'Well, there was a room a-top o' the place where there was a row o' taps an' a lot o' thick pipe an' a trough agin the wall, lined with lead. It was the best part o' the job, an' good for a fust-rate sackful in twenty minutes. So I outs with the chisels an' 'ammers to get to work, but Skibby wouldn't touch 'em. 'E took no notice o' me, but stuck with 'is back to the trough, starin' at the door we come in by.

'"Ketch 'old," I says. "Are you drunk, or what?"

'But 'e on'y stood an' stared at the door; so I wasted no more time. I began a-pullin' down the pipes on my own. "A fine cop bringin' you," I says. "I bet you 'll be on the job when it comes to takin' your whack, anyhow," I says. So I got on pullin' away the pipes. An' then I see as the rats was

gatherin' thick under the trough—between us an' the wall, you see. Such a rum start as that I never see in my life. They come sneakin' along the corner o' the wall all round—it was a cement floor—an' bunchin' up in a sort o' heap under the trough, an' the rummiest thing was all of 'em was lookin' an' sniffin' one way —between our legs at the door. I let go the pipe to look at 'em; an' then I heard Skibby go down whack on the floor, makin' noises like a chained-up dawg.

'"'Elp, Bob!" 'e calls out. "'Elp! Don't let 'im do it, Bob! Take it away from 'im, Bob!"

'I turned round, an' there 'e was on the floor, on his knees an' one hand, fencin' away with the other 'and in front of 'im.

'"For God's sake have mercy!" 'e said; a-talkin' to the empty room between 'im an' the door. "For God's sake have mercy! I've died—I've died a dozen times a'ready! Ain't it enough? Not now! Let me go! Let me go to my children!"

'I took him by the arm an' spoke to him, but he never turned his head; an' his face was worse than any corpse's I ever see. An' s'elp me, I looked under the trough, an' there

was the rats all round the other way, tails out, shovin' their noses down into the corner, an' fightin' to get deeper in the crowd! I knelt down aside of Skibby, an' shook him, an' he groaned, an' fell of a heap—sort o' fainted.

'I 'd had enough for a bit, so I shoved the hammers an' chisels in the sack an' rolled it up, an' I shook up Skibby again, an' started to get him out of it. He rolled up pretty dull an' stupid with a bit more shaking, an' I got him down the stairs. An' when we went out o' the room I see the rats sneakin' off both ways along the corner of the wall an' round to the door.

'I dragged 'im through the winder somehow, an' out on the marsh. "What 's come to you, Skibby?" I says. "Are you balmy?"

'"Didn't you see 'im?" says he, hangin' on to me tremblin'; "didn't you see 'im?'

'"See who?" says I.

'"Flash Povey," says Skibby.

'"Flash Povey!" says I. "Why, he 's been dead a month!"

'An' so he had. He pegged out while Skibby was doin' his six months, you remember.'

'Um,' said Snorkey Timms. 'An' that's all?'

'That's all what I didn't tell the coroner,' answered Bob. 'But I said 'e seemed very much off 'is rocker while 'e was with me. An' when we got to the canal he would go down along the towpath, though it wasn't 'is way 'ome.

'"Go along, Bob," 'e says; "you leave me alone. I'll be better in a bit."

'I didn't quite know what to do, but I thought I'd come along an' tell 'is missis 'e seemed a bit round-my-'at. An' so I did. An' they found 'im in the canal the next morning.'

*HEADS AND TAILS*

## A BLOT ON ST. BASIL

IN the parish of St. Basil-in-the-East there is like to be a vacancy for a male Bible-reader, for committees are aflare at the scandalous misuse of some part of Mr. Albert Murch's last week's pay. It was not extravagant pay for a week, being, in fact, some way short of a sovereign. But it was explained to him at his appointment that the consciousness of doing good should support him: not to mention his old mother. And many people—on the committees, for instance—worked zealously for no other reward whatever: as was notorious everywhere; and if it were not notorious, truly it was by no neglect of the committees.

Nor is this the first complaint against Mr. Murch, though certainly it is the most shocking. He was a promising young man in the beginning, becomingly docile and obedient, and with some enthusiasm for his work, as was

shown by his renunciation of his situation and prospects, in order to devote himself thereunto. But as time went, and his clothes grew seedier, it became vaguely suspected that he had begun to hold secret opinions of his own in the matters of visits and relief of the poor: an ineffable presumption. For the committees, and the associations, and the rest, did they not know all about it? They gave their whole energies (for some hours a week) to the business, and their names were known far and wide as Authorities on the Lives of the Poor; while he, of whom nobody out of the parish had ever heard, was little more than one of the poor himself, groping about underground among them. Now and again he had an irritating trick of being right; and if he had been less insignificant, and if the committees and associations had not needed most of their jealousy and spite for use among themselves, he would have run into trouble sooner.

It seemed plain that constant contact with the lower orders had blunted all his finer feelings. He would recommend the most sullen and unrepentant for relief—people so wholly conscious of their lack of claim that

they never asked for themselves; people altogether unconverted; while others, fervidly converted a dozen times over, and ever ready to be converted again, he reported 'undeserving.' Fortunately there were those who could check his discreditable partialities; as in a flagrant case, but a little before his final lapse, when a member of a committee, minded to make personal visits in Randall's Rents, found two very respectful and plainly deserving families wholly destitute of bedding, coals, and provisions—a state of affairs that Mr. Murch had never even reported. The deficiencies were supplied on the spot. And the Bible-reader's explanations, when he was called to account, were far-fetched and ludicrous. He tried to convince the committee that the two families, the Dodds and the Blandys, having word of the nearing visitor, passed their portable property through their windows, which stood frame to frame in a wall-angle; first all the Dodd bedclothes into the Blandys' room, and then, as soon as the visitor was engaged on other floors, all the Blandy property, with the Dodds' own, in the opposite direction, so that both rooms should

seem equally necessitous. To offer such a story was a mere trifling with the committee, and Mr. Murch was told so, with asperity. It was also an insult to the intelligence of the exploring committee-member, and an evidence of an unworthy attitude of mind toward the suffering poor.

Mr. Murch, for his part, went his way hopelessly enough. He was not a strong man, either in body or in spirit; and such strength as he possessed grew from fervour of conviction and knowledge of his work. Still, he was ever at odds with himself, and the prey of doubts. *Was* he right, after all, in his treatment of the Hanks, and should he have said what he did to the Poysers or not? Such questions kept him awake at night. Again, should he have given the man Briggs those few coppers from his own pocket (for the committee would give nothing), when his mother was old and ailing, and really needed beef-tea? Which way lay his duty?

His offence, which surprised even the Randall's Renters, and for that was noised abroad, was committed on a dank, wet day, when the world bore a more than commonly

hopeless aspect in his eyes. His umbrella had grown so bad of late, had gone at so many joints, that he left it at home. He buttoned his coat about him—though he was loth to put strain on the worn button-holes—turned down his hat-brim, and dodged the puddles as best he might.

Randall's Rents was to be the scene of his morning's work, and thither he took his way, through streets growing narrower and fouler as he went. Mrs. Bannam's was the case he had most in mind, and he doubted much if he should find her alive. A long course of drinking, and insufficient eating with it, had laid her low with a hopeless hobnailed liver, and now hyperstatic pneumonia had come in to cut the struggle shorter. As a hard drinker she was no rarity in Randall's Rents, but she had been also a hard worker, which was in no way so common. She had sworn at a lady visitor, who had pushed into her room without knocking or asking leave, and so was cut off from the aid of committees ; and she had loudly proclaimed that she could work for her own blankets, coals, and groceries, and would neither beg, nor go to church, nor be con-

verted, in order to get them free. She had been the chief support of a very large son of about thirty, who cherished his constitution by leaning against the doorpost of the Three Bells, and felt unfitted for personal exertion except when supplies ran short, and it became imperatively necessary to punch his mother. So that her now destitute child had taken himself off, and neighbours tended her.

As Mr. Murch, already half wet through, turned the corner into Randall's Rents, harsh yells met his ears, and an occasional shout, as of encouragement. The yells were the yells of Mrs. Blandy, who danced about the gutter, and screamed defiance at the Dodds, one and all. For the Dodds had turned out unsportsmanlike in regard to the spoil of the committee-member, and this was the third day of the consequent row. The fortune of sport had so laid it that the Dodds had received the larger dole, and while the Blandys very properly held that the whole bag, as product of their joint operations, should be put to fair division, the Dodds held fast to all they had got, and kept in the family all the liquor it produced.

'Call yerself a man!' shrieked Mrs. Blandy,

who was menacing each member of the opposing family in turn, and now came to its head. 'Call yerself a man! Why, look there! There goes the bloomin' Bible-reader. Blimy if *'e* ain't a better man than you! 'E don't 'ide away from a woman, any'ow! An' you 're a——'

Mr. Murch hurried on, and entered an open door. Mrs. Bannam's room was on the second floor, but he stopped at a door just within the passage to ask for news. He knocked, but got no answer. Then again, and called, 'Mrs. Tapner!' Whereat came a sound from within, between a grunt and a wail, and Murch pushed open the door.

Mrs. Tapner was very fat, very dirty, very much unhooked about the bodice, greatly bedraggled about the hair, and not at all sober. She sat on a stool, and her head lay back against the wall.

'Giddy young kipper!' she gurgled, with a leer. 'Giddy young kipper, comin' into a lady's room when she 's drunk! 'Ave a lil drop yeself!' And she pointed to a small flat bottle on the floor beside her.

It was a safe offer, for everybody knew Mr.

Murch for a teetotaler. 'I came to ask about Mrs. Bannam,' he said, 'before I go up. I suppose you 've not been up there this morning?'

'Mish' Bannam 's wuss off 'n me,' the woman answered, with a hiccup and a giggle. 'I 'm in 'eaven; presen'ly she 'll be in 'ell, with no 'eaven fust, like what I 've got. Doctor 's up there now.'

Murch thought he would wait, and see the doctor as he came out. He turned slowly toward the door, and the woman behind him chuckled again.

'What 's good o' you?' she said. 'You bring pore people 'ell out o' the Bible; others brings us 'eaven—in a quartern bottle.'

'If you was sober you 'd be ashamed to know you said such things,' said Mr. Murch. 'There 's no 'eaven in the gin-bottle, but bitter repentance. Any one that brings you that 's no friend.'

'Ain't they? Not when they brings it in a ticket, or a pair o' boots, or a petticut? Oh, there 's ways! *You* know.'

Truly he knew, and knew the regular tariff in gin for charity-given shirts and boots and

groceries. But the doctor's step was on the stairs.

'Ah!' said the doctor on the landing; 'I won't be back again unless I 'm called, and I know I shan't be. Two or three hours is about her time—more or less. I suppose you must say something, but I wouldn't worry her.'

The air of the room was faint and fetid. A rag of old skirt half obscured the grimy window, against which a bare-armed slattern pressed her face, to catch what view she might of the row outside Dodd's. She turned her head at Murch's entrance, but, seeing it was he, she addressed her eyes again to the window.

The bed was a low one, indefinite as to shape and supports, and covered with the dying woman's skirts and under-clothes, supplementary to the insufficient bed-linen. A chair had been planted at the upper end, supported in which she half sat, half lay. Her face was gross and puffy, slaty in hue, and blue about the mouth, and she breathed lightly and quickly, eyes fixed on the wall before her: for to take breath was now conscious and incessant work. Murch stepped quietly across the floor, and knelt beside her.

'Don't—read,' she said presently, with a breath between the words.

He had not intended to read, for he remembered the doctor's caution. Without, the row waxed amain, and it was plain that one Dodd, at least, had sallied from the stronghold. Feet pattered on the pavement, and boys yelled delight. At the window the woman jammed her eye closer, for the fray was drifting up the street.

Murch bent his head for a few seconds. When he looked up the dying woman was regarding him—a little curiously, he thought.

'I'm—goin'—'ard—crool 'ard,' she gasped.

He offered comforting words—though he had said them so often in such cases that they had become a formula, and he felt them a mockery. The row in the street quieted suddenly, and then revived in a new key. No doubt a policeman had come.

'Can I do anything to make you comfortable?' Murch asked, softly.

'Ever—know—me—beg?'

'Never once.'

Again her eyes were turned on him with an

odd, questioning look. 'Then—gimme—sixpence—now,' she said.

He wondered. 'What is it you want?' he asked.

She made as though to shake her head. 'No—gimme—the—sixpence.'

Too well he knew what any bye-chance sixpence went to buy in Randall's Rents. 'But,' he murmured, 'I—I'm afraid you'd buy gin with it.'

At the words the slaty mask lit up, and the eyes turned skyward. 'Wouldn't—I—just!' said Mrs. Bannam.

He stood, conscious of a strange shock. Well indeed his creed taught him—the hard creed he learned at his mother's knees—the fate of that lost soul in two hours' time. And the words were fresh in his ears—the words of the obscene creature leering and rolling below: 'No 'eaven fust, like what I've got!'

He turned toward the door, his hand to his head. Then he looked, as for help, to the slattern at the window; but though she may have heard, she looked without, where two policemen were hauling off her neighbours. His gaze fell last on the bed, and there was

a blue, appealing face that looked as it were already from another world.

Two pennies and a sixpence was all left of last week's pay. He scarce knew his hand had gone to his pocket ere the sixpence was lying on the bed, and he was stumbling blindly on the stairs.

# ONE MORE UNFORTUNATE

BILL HARNELL, lighterman, red and hairy, clumped home late up Old Gravel Lane. For such bad times as these on the river, Bill had had a lucky spell, and he bore its trophies with him. A new pair of water-boots is a thing of consideration, a matter of thirty-five shillings ; a piece of trade gear renewed on momentous days, years apart, when the fates are propitious and savings adequate ; days remembered with birthdays and wedding-days. This had been such a day ; more, it was a day of general rig-out, and Bill Harnell's blue serge coat, thick as a board, was new and stiff from the slop-shop, as also was his cap. Where light fell from a shop window a bulging pocket was observable in the new coat, with an exposed wrap of paper and a fishtail—signs of supper provided for. And so Bill Harnell, rolling at the shoulders, stiff and heavy below the

knees, clumped home that evening up Old Gravel Lane, reflective.

Truly he was a fortunate man, and not as so many in the swamp of humanity about him. There were some whom the price of his water-boots would keep in better raiment than their own for two years and more, and to whom his serge coat, when rotten and threadbare with time, would be a prize to risk gaol or life for; many who at that moment might be debating whether or not more of life were worth the waiting—for want of an unconsidered morsel of that supper that bulged his coat-pocket.

Bill Harnell might have been clairvoyant. Two hundred yards ahead, where the great dock-wall turned its vast flank into the lane, a bridge spanned a dark channel. It was the 'Mr. Baker's trap' of old days—since that coroner's time called, with more sentiment and less wit, the Bridge of Sighs. Here the life-weary, and those drunk enough to feel so, from all Wapping, Shadwell, and Ratcliff flung over into the foul dock-fluid, and were drowned and lost, or fished out, dead or alive as the case might be, with boat-hooks. Mostly they were women. And there were so many that a policeman on

that beat would stop and watch any woman as she crossed the bridge, and would hasten to move on one who showed a sign of lingering.

Now no policeman was in sight ; no man but one, a hulking shadow, half visible up a foul passage. Down on the rail of the bridge a woman cowered, thinly clothed and almost shoeless, clutching the iron with both hands, and turning her eager, haggard face this way and that as she listened.

From along the lane came the sound of a slow, heavy tramp. A policeman! The woman rose and hurried toward the deeper shadow by the dock-wall. No—not a policeman ; a home-going lighterman with heavy new water-boots. The woman hesitated and stopped. There were other, fainter footsteps farther off. Now—or wait? Now. She ran back to the middle of the bridge, seized the rail, flung her knee upon it and rolled over.

There was a great splash and a shriek. Bill Harnell, slow and heavy ashore, was deft and active in sight of water. From his trudge he broke into a clangorous run, and swung down by the bridge-foot to the quay. There was no boat and no long hook. In an instant his thick

coat was off, and sitting on it, he tore off his heavy boots, dropped them on the spot, and dived. Something floated in the shadow of the bridge, and for that he swam. It was the woman, floating still, and shrieking, though now but faintly. He took her by the hair and turned for the quay steps. She made no trouble by way of clinging and clutching, for which Bill was duly thankful; for he had rescued before, in the river. Up the steps he dragged her by the armpits and set her down. There he left her, and took to staring about the quay paving: for the black heap of coat and boots was no longer there.

His glance rose from his feet, and lo! up by the bridge-foot, her single skirt clutched about her knees, scuttled the woman, nimble though dripping, and vanished in the foul passage, where now no hulking shadow was. Two seconds more of staring, and Bill followed in his wet socks. But the passage was empty. It led into an alley; the alley was empty also. Bill Harnell returned, and found a stranger or two.

'Lor'!' said an immense woman who kept her hands under her apron. 'Done 'im for 'is boots, pore bloke. What a shame!'

'Wet, mate?' asked another, kindly.

'It's jist the same ol' game,' pursued the first. 'They done it afore, many 's a time. It 's water-boots they tries for mostly. They ought t' 'ave six munse, both on 'em—'er an 'er bloke. *She* won't never be drownded; swims like anythink!'

'Wot 's 'er name?' demanded Bill, as the state of the case grew apparent. 'Oo are they, an' where do they live?'

The faces about him were instantly expressionless as a brick wall. 'No—we dunno, mate,' came the reply in far-away tones, 'we dunno nothin' about 'em. You go 'ome 'fore you ketch cold.'

His teeth were chattering already. 'An' if I'd 'a' let 'er drownd,' he mumbled dismally, 'I might 'a' got five bob for findin' the body!' And this was the truth.

# INGRATES AT BAGSHAW'S

THOUGH it was not in the main road Bagshaw's was a place as well known as the parish church. It was, indeed, in a by-street, but hard by the end that joined the chief market of the neighbourhood. Bagshaw was a chemist and druggist, and his shop, once filling no more than the space of one room in a six-roomed house, had grown into the houses on each side and up toward their roofs, till, like a great flaming cancer, it had assimilated and transformed the whole triple structure, and, with shop, storerooms, and what not, left but one old room at the first-floor back that was unused by way of trade. It was in this room that old Nye and his wife bestowed themselves at night.

Well it was for them, said many, that they had fallen into the hands of such a man as Mr. Bagshaw: else the workhouse had been their portion long since. Old Nye had been

a soldier, but all that now remained of his soldiering was a Crimean medal that was never seen. He was a grey, neutral sort of old man, a docile fulfiller of orders, prompted through the world by his wife, and aimless away from her. She grew old, unsteady, and peevish, as, indeed, did he. They snarled at each other by fits, but they were never far apart. To all who would see they stood a monument of Mr. Bagshaw's zeal in good deeds. For twelve years and more had they enjoyed of his charity the shelter of the top back room, such cast-off clothes as could not be sold, and a not infrequent shilling. On their part they

> Scrubbed the floors,
> Cleaned the windows and the paint,
> Polished the brass plates,
> Washed the bottles,
> Swept,
> Dusted,
> Carried coals,
> Cleaned stoves,
> Washed towels and dusters,
> Ran on errands,
> Licked labels,

and when Mr. Bagshaw was too busy to go home at mid-day they cooked chops and washed plates. When it was muddy, too, old Nye cleaned Mr. Bagshaw's boots, and when it was dry summer he refreshed the shop-front with new paint. What the old couple did with their leisure was not known; some feared they wasted it in idleness. Others held it ill that comfortable berths should exist for them that had pensions, though most knew that old Nye had none. He was not an interesting old soldier; he told no stories, and even his limp, he said, he got from falling off a ladder. When first he came under Mr. Bagshaw's protection he would have liked to wear his medal on his waistcoat, as he had done aforetime; but Mr. Bagshaw taught him that he should rather be ashamed of having once given himself to the trade of murder, and the medal was hidden shamefacedly away.

For Mr. Bagshaw was a man of influence among the meaner minds about him: an elevating force through all Bow. Not a chapel revival meeting but was the goodlier and the juicier for his fervid exhortings—even for his presence: not a prayer-meeting but

gained in desert by his copious invocations. He had become stout and round-faced in his prosperity, but the face was pale, smooth, and flat, and bore no trace of any bodily indulgence that was not respectable. He walked in the street with his head thrown back, the cape of his Inverness cloak flung wide over his shoulders, black silk lining outward, and his expression that of joyous piety. Altogether a man of great popular account. He was a guardian of the poor, and in that capacity had long maintained a dignified struggle against oakum picking in the casual ward: a task dishonouring to the workers, a thing destructive of the dignity of labour and an insult to the higher humanity. More, he was a vestryman: and the navvies found him a ready champion in their protest against the use of pauper labour on the roads. So that his virtues were not unregarded of the people, and, indeed, he had his reward, even in business. In his shop, withal, his excellence shone undimmed. He had no medical or surgical qualifications, yet he freely gave the best advice he could to the suffering poor who came for drugs, and not one was sent empty

away, so long as he had some money to offer, however little, for medicine. For, once the sum available were ascertained, it were hard indeed if something could not be made up that should come within the price, and moreover, leave the shade of profit that was Mr. Bagshaw's just due. But some payment there must be, for then was the beneficiary's self-respect and independence maintained; and there was no credit, for debt destroyed the moral fibre. It is the duty of a philanthropist to consider such things for his ignorant neighbours.

And so Mr. Bagshaw, diligent in his business, prospered in well-doing. Even his maintenance of Old Nye and his wife was not all loss. In addition to the services their natural gratitude prompted them to render, there came two several five-pound notes from an officer of Nye's old regiment whose servant the old man had been, and these went some way toward repayment for their lodging and expenses, which, indeed, were not over-large after all. Moreover, there was no necessity for a boy, nor for a charwoman. Still, there were vexations. The Nyes grew old and ineffectual.

Their admiration of their patron's discourses and invocations led them to his chapel in clothes that were disgraceful to a respectable place of worship, and reflected discredit on himself; to these intrusions, however, he put an end. Then it was found that Nye had pawned his old silver watch—had gone straight from Mr. Bagshaw's establishment into a low pawnshop, and had probably been seen. True, he was penitent, when taxed with the fault, but the thing was done.

But chiefly, the old couple aged fast. There came a time when old Nye was unsafe on the steps as he cleaned the windows, and when, in fact, the windows were very ill cleaned. His sight was bad, too, and he knocked down jars. He grew slow on errands, and forgot them half-way. Once he broke a window as he staggered by with a shutter; he could not carry a scuttle without dropping a trail of coal, and bottles, in the washing, slipped from his shaking hands and smashed. The mild young shop assistant helped him, but he had work of his own, and there was no concealing the old man's growing uselessness. He felt it himself, and strove to hide it in a show of alacrity and

nimbleness that made things worse. As for the old woman, though her wits remained the clearer, she failed otherwise worse than he. She would drop in a heap from her chronic rheumatism, and her share of the charing would fall to be done by Old Nye, unequal to his own. Old Nye and his missis were worn out.

Clearly, the thing could not go on thus. Bagshaw's with smeared windows, half-polished brass, dirty floors—it would never do. Somebody else must be found to do the work. Certainly it would come more expensive, but it could not be helped; and by the favour of providence the business could well afford it. The question was how to get rid of old Nye and his wife. Popular as Mr. Bagshaw was, a little thing might destroy the general remembrance of his years of patient benignity. Fortunately a way presented itself.

Not far from Bagshaw's was a public-house where forms and trestle-tables still stood in front as they had done when Bow was a green village. Old Nye was passing this place on some dimly-remembered errand, when a greengrocer's man said to three soldiers with whom

he sat: 'Look at that; 'e 's a old soldier—Crimea. Ain't very bloomin', is 'e, not to look at?' Old Nye heard himself hailed, and one of the soldiers, reaching out, seized him by the arm. ''Scuse me, sergeant, you 're going past the canteen. Come—don't be proud, if we *are* on'y young 'uns.' And he drew old Nye to the seat beside him.

The old man would not stay long, for he had his errand, and must not seem slow. He was dull and preoccupied, and only answered, 'Thank ye kindly,' and replied to whatever was said with doubtful stammers and mumblings. But the beer comforted him, and presently he went his way with firmer steps.

Few of her neighbours' faults escaped the eyes and ears of Mrs. Webster, moralist. Indeed, she had observed the whole circumstances of old Nye's detention, from the door of the adjoining greengrocer's. Determined that Mr. Bagshaw should at least know how his forbearance was abused, she hastened at once to that philanthropist with a full report. Was it right that his dependant should thus openly disgrace him, carousing with common soldiers before a public-house?

Deeply pained as Mr. Bagshaw was, he saw his duty clearly. The Nyes must go. If all his years of patient effort had failed to arouse in them the proper moral sense, then the attempt was futile. Sorrowfully, but with unmistakable firmness, he announced his determination to old Nye. The old man stared and gulped, and clutched at the counter with the nearer hand. His gaze wandered round the shop and he mumbled dismally, but he said nothing. Having discharged a painful duty with a proper observance, Mr. Bagshaw retired behind the shop.

It was at least an hour ere old Nye came to Mr. Bagshaw, and, feebly and with a trembling dryness of the. mouth, besought a reconsideration—at least a respite. His wife was bad just then (she was, indeed, in bed at the moment) but would be better soon. They separated man and wife in the workhouse; and, perhaps, in a little while he could find another place. He was truly sorry; it should not occur again; and so forth. But Mr. Bagshaw's resolve was not to be shaken by mere words. This much he conceded, nevertheless: that the pair should stay till the end of the

week. For he reflected that he was not yet prepared with any one to succeed them.

Old Nye did his futile best with the duties of both till Friday, when the old woman appeared again and went about her work as she had not done for months; so that Mr. Bagshaw half thought of the possibility of keeping her without her husband. In the dinner-hour, while Mr. Bagshaw was away, she talked to the mild assistant with deferential flattery, offered to clean down his shelves behind the dispensing screen, and asked a respectful question or two about the drugs she found there. At closing-time that night as the assistant reached his coat he heard old Nye say in the back scullery :—

'There 'll be the brass to clean fust thing in the mornin'; I 'll go down the yard an' mix the ile and brickdust ready.'

'Not to-night,' answered the old woman. 'Rest now, Tom.'

The mild assistant had never heard old Nye's Christian name before.

* * * * * *

In the morning the assistant found the shutters still up. He carried a key of the

shop door, however, and passed in. Nobody was about. He called up the stairs and out into the yard, but was not answered. Then he went up to the door of the little bedroom and knocked vigorously. Still there was no sound. He called. The door was not locked, so presently he pushed it open.

The blind was down, and the old iron bedstead, with its ragged heap of bed, lay in shadow. There was a close smell of guttered candle, and another smell, slighter and subtler. He pulled the blinds aside, and the light fell on a pillow and on a man's face, livid, blue, and staring, with set teeth and frothy lips. He started back, tearing the rotten blind from its roller; and there on the bed's edge, as in act of mounting it, lay huddled another body, trailing to the floor a skinny shank, knotted and monstrous at the knee.

He ran into the street, aghast and shouting. People gathered and policemen came. When the stairs were mounted again the smell of guttered candle was still to be perceived, but the fainter scent of prussic acid had fled on the fresher air. Under the woman's clenched hand lay a blue phial with a staring label. It

was one, the assistant saw, from a shelf behind the dispensing screen. When they came to look at the spot whence it had been taken, there, in a little heap, lay a pierced penny-piece, three halfpence, and a blackened old Crimean medal.

Sympathy for Mr. Bagshaw was general through all Bow.

## RHYMER THE SECOND

BILL WRAGG, dealer in all creatures in size between that of a donkey and that of a mouse, but chiefly merchant of dogs, keeps a little shop on the right of a stable-entry in ——well, in London. He has taken me into his confidence, and there may be reasons why he would not like to see his precise address in print. Bill is a stoutish man of forty-five, with a brown, shaven face that looks very soft and puffy under the eyes and hard as rock everywhere else. He is a prosperous man nowadays, as prosperity goes in the dog and guinea-pig line, and he has a sort of semi-detached assistant, a slightly junior creature of his own kind, whose name is Sam. Sam's other name is sometimes Brown, sometimes Styles, and sometimes Walker; and sometimes Sam is Bill's accredited agent, and sometimes he doesn't even know him by sight.

Bill Wragg, as I have said, has now and again

taken me into his confidence, in an odd, elliptic, non-committal manner that is all his own. Thus I have learned how, in the beginning of things, he started business in the parrot line with no money and no parrots; of how he set up, after this first transaction, with a capital of five shillings and an empty bird-cage; and other such professional matters. Among them was the story of a champion fox-terrier which he once possessed, from which he had made a very respectable profit, and to which he looked back with much pride.

Bill sat on the edge of his rat-pit as he told the story, while I, preferring the society of Bill's best bull-pup before that of the few hundred squirming creatures that wriggled and fought a foot below Bill's coat-tails, used the upturned basket that was the seat of honour of the place.

'That little bit o' business,' said Bill, 'was one o' my neatest, an' yet it was simple an' plain enough for any chap as was properly up in the lor about dawgs; any other cove might ha' made 'is honest fifty quid or so just the same way if he'd ha' thought of it; might do it now a'most—anyway if there was a mad-dog

scare on, like what there was when I done this. It was jist this way. Me an' Sam, we was a-lookin' through the Crystal Palace Show when we sees quite a little crowd in the middle o' the fox-terrier bench. "Oh, what a love!" says one big gal. "What a darlin'!" says another. "He's a good dawg if you like," says a swell. All a-puttin' on the mighty fly, ye know, 'cos they could see "Fust Prize" stuck up over the dawg, so he was pretty sure to be a good 'un. "'E *is* a good pup, sure enough," says Sam, when we got past the crowd; "wait till them swells hooks it, an' see." An' right enough, 'e was jist the best fox-terrier under the twelvemonth that ever I see, in a show or out. Sharp an' bright as a bantam; lovely 'ead; legs, back, chest, fust-rate everywhere; an' lor', what a neck! Not a bad speck on 'im. Well—there, *you* know what 'e is! Rhymer the Second; fit to win anywhere now, though 'e's getting a bit old.'

I knew the name very well as that of a dog that had been invincible in fox-terrier open classes a few years back. It was news to me that Bill Wragg had ever possessed such a dog as that.

'Rhymer the Second,' Bill repeated, biting off a piece from the straw he was chewing and beginning at the other end. 'Though I called 'im Twizzler when 'e was mine. Pure Bardlet strain, an' the best that ever come from it. An' 'ere 'e was, fust in puppy class, fust in novice class, fust in limit class, an' all at fust go.'

'"Eh?" says Sam, "that's about yer sort, ain't it?"

'"Why, yus," I says, "'e's a bit of *all* right. I could do very nice with 'im," I says.

'Sam grins, artful like. "Well, ye never know yer luck," he says. An' I *was* a-beginnin' to think things over.'

Mr. Wragg drew another straw from a sack by his side and resumed.

'So we went an' bought a catalogue, an' I went on a-thinkin' things over. I thought 'em over to that extent that I fell reg'lar in love with that little dawg, an' made up my mind I could pretty 'ardly live without 'im. I am that sentimental, ye see, over a nice dawg. We sees the owner's address in the catalogue, an' he was a rare toff—reg'lar nob, with a big 'ouse over Sutton way, breedin' fox-terriers for

amusement. Sam took a bit o' trouble an' found out all about the 'ouse, an' 'e found out that the swell kep' a boy that took out all the dawgs for exercise reg'lar every mornin'. "I thought as 'ow you might like to 'ave jist one more fond look at 'im," says Sam.

'"Well, I think I should," says I; "an' maybe take 'im a little present—a bit o' liver or what not."

'So Sam borrowed a 'andy little pony-barrer, an' next mornin' me an' 'im went fer a drive over Sutton way. We stops at a quiet, convenient sort o' corner by a garden wall, where the boy allus come by with the dawgs, an' Sam, what 'ad picked up a pore stray cat close by, 'e stood off a bit farther on, like as though 'e'd never seen me afore in all his nat'ral.

'Well, we didn't have to wait very long afore the boy comes along with a 'ole mob o' fox-terriers, all runnin' all over the shop, 'cept two or three young 'uns on leads, an' givin' the boy all he could do to keep 'em together, I can tell ye. There was very nigh a score in the crowd, but I picked out my little beauty at once, an' there 'e was, trottin' along nice and

genelmanly jist where I wanted 'im, a bit behind most on 'em. Jist as the boy goes past me I ketches my little beauty's eye an' whips out my little present—a nice bit o' liver with just a *touch* o' fakement on it, you understand—just enough to fetch 'im. At the same moment Sam, in front, 'e somehow lets go the pore stray cat, an' off goes the 'ole bloomin' pack o' terriers arter 'er, an' the boy arter *them*, hollerin' an' whippin' like fun—all 'cept my little beauty, as was more took up with my little bit o' liver. See?'

I saw, and the old rascal's eyes twinkled with pride in the neatness of his larceny.

'Well, that cat made sich a fair run of it, an' the dawgs went arter 'er at sich a split, that in about 'arf a quarter of a minute my pore little beauty was a lost dawg with nobody in the world to take care of 'im but me an' Sam. An' in about 'arf a quarter of a minute more 'e was in a nice warm basket with plenty o' straw, a-havin' of a ride 'ome in the pony-barrer jist as fast as the pony could take 'im. *I* ain't the cove to leave a pore little dawg all alone in the world.'

Here I laughed, and Bill Wragg's face

assumed an expression of pained surprise. 'Well, no more I ain't,' he said. 'Look what a risk I was a-takin' all along of a romantical attachment for that dawg. Why, I might ha' bin 'ad up for *stealin'* 'im!'

I banished unseemly mirth and looked very serious. 'So you might,' I said. 'Terrible. Go on. Did you bring him home?'

''E *accompanied* us, sir, all the way. When we took 'im out 'e was just a bit shy-like at bein' in a strange place, but as well as ever. I says to the missis, I says, "'Ere's a pore little lost dawg we've found. I think 'e's a pretty good 'un."

'"Ah!" says she, "that 'e is." The missis 'as got a pretty good eye for a dawg—for a woman! "That 'e is," says she. "Are ye goin' to keep 'im?"'

'"Keep 'im?" says I. "No," I says, "not altogether. That wouldn't be honest. I'm a-goin' to buy 'im, legal an' honourable."

'"Buy 'im?" says the missis, not tumblin' to the racket. "Buy 'im? 'Ow?"

'"Buy 'im cheap," says I, "in about a month's time. 'E'd be too dear jist at present for a pore 'ard-workin' chap like me.

But we 'll keep 'im for a month in *case* we 're able to find out the owner. Pity we can't afford to feed 'im very well," I says, "an' o' course 'e *might* get a touch o' mange or summat—but that 's luck. All you 've got to do is to keep 'im close when I 'm out, an' take care 'e don't get lost again."

'So we chained 'im up amongst the rest for that night, an' we kep' 'im indoors for a month on the chain. O' course, bein' a pore man, I couldn't afford to feed 'im as well as the others—'im bein' another man's dawg as could well afford to keep 'im, an' ought never to ha' bin so careless a-losin' of 'im. An' besides, a dawg kep' on the chain for a month don't want so much grub as one as gits exercise. Anybody knows that. An' what 's more, as I was a-goin' to buy 'im reg'lar, the wuss condition 'e got in the cheaper 'e 'd come, ye see. So if we did starve 'im a bit, more or less, it was all out of affection for 'im. An' we let 'is coat go any'ow, an' we give it a touch of a little fakement I know about that makes it go patchy an' *look* like mange—though it 's easy enough got rid of. An' so we kep' 'im for

a month, an' 'e got seedier every day; an', o' course, we never 'eard anything from the swell at Sutton.

'Well, at the end o' the month the little dawg looks pretty mis'rable an' taper. An', to say nothink o' the mangy coat an' bad condition, all 'is spirit an' carriage was gone, an' *you* know as 'ow spirit an' carriage is arf the pints in a fox-terrier. So I says to the missis, "Come," I says, "I 'm about tired o' keepin' another man's dawg for nothink. Jist you put a string on 'im an' take 'im round to the p'lice-station."

'"What?" says the missis. "Why, I thought you was a-goin' to *buy* him!" For ye see she 'adn't tumbled to the racket yet.

'"Never you mind," says I; "you git yer bonnet an' do what I tell you."

'So the missis gits her bonnet an' puts a string on Rhymer the Second (which looked anythink but a winner by this time, you may bet) an' goes off to the p'lice-station. She'd got her tale all right, o' course, from me, all about the stray dawg that had bin follerin' 'er, an' seemed so 'ungry, pore thing, an' wouldn't go away, an' that she was 'arf afraid of. So

they took 'im in, o' course, as dooty bound, an' put 'im along of the other strays, an' the missis she come 'ome without 'im.

'Well, Sam gives a sort o' casual eye to the p'lice-station, an' next mornin' 'e sees a bobby go off with the strays what had been collected —about 'arf-a-dozen of 'em—with our little chap among 'em, to the Dawgs' 'Ome. Now, in understandin' my little business speculation, you must remember that this was in the thick o' the muzzlin' rage, when the p'lice was very strict, an' the Dawgs' 'Ome was full enough to bust. I knowed the ropes o' the thing, an' I knowed pretty well what 'ud 'appen. The little dawg 'ud be took in among the others in the big yard where they keep all the little 'uns, a place cram jam full o' other dawgs about 'is size an' condition, so as it ain't allus easy to tell t'other from which. There 'e'd stop for *three days*—no less an' no more, unless 'e was claimed or bought. If 'e wasn't either claimed or bought at the end o' three days, into the oven 'e went, an' there was an end of 'im. Mind you, in ordinary the good 'uns 'ud be picked out an' nussed up an' what not, an' sold better; but these busy days there

was no time an' no conveniences for that, an' they 'ad to treat all alike. So that I was pretty sure anyway that the Sutton swell 'ad made 'is visit long ago, an', o' course, found nothink. So next day I says to the missis, "Missis, I've got another job for you. There's a pore little lost dawg at the Dawgs' 'Ome I want ye to buy. You'll git him for about five bob. 'E looks pretty much off colour, I expect—'arf starved, with a touch o' mange; an' 'e's a fox-terrier."

'When the missis tumbled to it at last I thought she'd ha' bust 'erself a-laughin'. "Lor', Bill," she says, "you—well there—you *are*! I never guessed what you was a-drivin' at!"

'"All right," says I, "you know now, anyway. Pitch your mug a bit more solemn than that an' sling out arter the dawg. An' *mind*," I says, "mind an' git the proper receipt for the money in the orfice."

''Cos why? That's lor. *I* knowed all that afore I begun the speculation. You go an' buy a dawg, fair an' honest, at the Dawgs' 'Ome, an' get a receipt for yer money, an' that dawg's *yourn*—yourn straight an' legal,

afore all the judges of England, no matter whose that dawg might ha' bin once. That 's bin tried an' settled long ago. Now you see my arrangement plain enough, don't ye?'

'Yes,' I said, 'I think I do. A little rough on the original owner, though, wasn't it?'

'Business—nothink but business! Why, bless ye, I 'd ha' bin in the workus long enough ago if I 'adn't kep' a sharp eye to business. An', lor', honesty 's the best policy, as this 'ere speculation shows ye plain. If I 'd ha' bin dishonest an' *stole* that dawg an' kep' it, what good would it ha' bin to me? None at all. I couldn't ha' showed it, I couldn't ha' sold it for more 'n a song, an' if I 'ad, why, it 'ud ha' bin spotted an' I 'd ha' bin 'ad up. Well, six months' 'ard ain't what I keep shop for, an' it ain't business. But playin' the honest, legal, proper game I made a bit, as you 'll see.

'The missis she goes off to the Dawgs' 'Ome. Mind you, *they* didn't know 'er. She only took the dawg to the p'lice, an' the p'lice took 'im to the 'ome. So the missis goes to the 'ome with 'er tale all ready, an' "Please, I want a little dawg," she says, "a

nice, cheap little dog for me an' my 'usband to make a pet of. I think I 'd like one o' them little white 'uns," she says; "I dunno what they call 'em, but I mean them little white 'uns with black marks." She can pitch it in pretty innocent, can the missis, when she likes.

'"Why," says the man, "I expect you mean a fox-terrier. Well, we 've got plenty o' them. Come this way, mum, an' look at 'em."

'So 'e takes 'er along to the yard where the little 'uns was, an' she looks through the bars an' pretty soon she spots our little dawg not far off, lookin' as bad as any of 'em. "There," says she, "that 's the sort o' little dawg I was a-thinking of, if 'e wouldn't come too dear—that one there that looks so 'ungry, pore thing. I 'd keep 'im well fed, I would," she says.

'Well, it was all right about the price, an' she got 'im for the five bob, an' got the receipt too, all reg'lar an' proper, in the orfice. "You ain't chose none so bad, mum," says the keeper, lookin' 'im over. "'E 's a very good little dawg is that, only out o' con-

dition. If we 'adn't bin so busy we 'd ha' put 'im into better trim, an' then 'e 'd ha' bin dearer."

'"Oh," says the missis, "then I couldn't 'ave afforded to buy 'im; so I 'm glad you didn't."

'"Well," says the man, "there 's no character with 'im, o' course, but I shouldn't be surprised if 'e was a pedigree dawg." '*E* knowed a thing or two, did that keeper.

'So ye see the little dawg was mine, proper an' legal. Bein' mine, I could afford to treat 'im well, an' precious soon, what with a dose or two o' stuff, careful feeding, plenty o' exercise, an' proper care o' the coat, Rhymer the Second was as bright an' 'andsome as ever. Only we called 'im Twizzler for reasons o' business, as you 'll understand. An' 'e comes on so prime that I registers 'im, an' next show just round 'ere I enters 'im for every class 'e 'd go in—open class, novice class, an' limit class. And blowed if 'e didn't take fust in all of 'em, an' a special too! But there—'e couldn't but win, sich a beauty as 'e was; he ketches the judge's eye at once. After all the bad 'uns 'ad bin sent out o' the

ring it was all done—the judge couldn't leave off lookin' at 'im. So there it was arter all —all the fusts for "Mr. W. Wragg's Twizzler, pedigree unknown. *Not for Sale.*"

'Well, that was pretty good, but there was more to come. Just afore the show closed I was a-lookin' round with Sam, when one o' the keepers comes up with a message from the sec't'ry. "There's a gent carryin' on like one o'clock," says the keeper, "about your fox-terrier. Swears it's 'is as was stole from 'im a while back, an' the sec't'ry would like you to step over."

'O' course, I was all ready, with the receipt snug an' 'andy in my pocket, an' I goes over bold as brass. There was the sec't'ry with 'is rosette, an' another chap with 'is, an' a p'liceman an' a keeper, an' there was the toff with gig-lamps an' a red face, a-shakin' of his fist an' rantin' an' goin' on awful. "I tell you that's my dawg," 'e says; "the most valuable animal in my kennels, stole while 'e was bein' exercised! Some one shall go to gaol over this!" 'e says. "Show me the man as entered it!"

'"All right, guv'nor," says I, calm an'

peaceful, "that 's me; *I* entered 'im. Little dawg o' mine called Twizzler. What was you a-sayin' about 'im?"

'"Why, the dog 's mine, I tell you, you rascal! Stolen in February! And you 've changed his name! What——"

'"Steady on, guv'nor," I says, quiet an' dignified. "You 're excited an' rather insultin'. *I* ain't changed any dawg's name. 'E 'adn't got no name when I bought 'im, an' I give 'im the one 'e 's got now. An' as to 'is bein' your dawg—well, 'e ain't, 'cos 'e 's mine."

'"Then how did you come by him?" he says, madder than ever.

'"Bought 'im, sir," I says, "reg'lar an' proper an' legal. Bought 'im for five shillin's."

'"Five shillings!" roars the toff. "Why, that dog 's worth a hundred and fifty pounds! Here, where 's a policeman? I 'll give him in charge! I 'll see this thing through; I 'll——"

'"Five bob was the price, guv'nor," says I, quiet an' genelmanly. "Though I 've no doubt you understand 'is value better than what I do. An' 'ere 's my receipt," I says,

"that makes me 'is owner honest an' legal before any judge in England!" An' I pulls out the paper.

'"Well, just look here," says the sec't'ry, "don't let's have any wrangling. There's a misunderstanding somewhere. You two gentlemen come into my office and see if it can't be settled." 'Cos, you see, a little crowd was a-gettin' round, an' the sec't'ry he see well enough 'ow I stood. So we walks over to the orfice, me leadin' the dawg along o' me, an' the toff puffin' an' blusterin' an' goin' on like steam.

'"Come," says the sec't'ry, pleasant an' cordial, "you two gentlemen have a cigar with me, and a whisky and soda," 'e says; "and let's see if this little matter can't be settled in a friendly way," 'e says.

'"Well," says I, "I'm agreeable enough. Only what can I do, when this 'ere genelman comes a-kickin' up a row an' claimin' my dawg, what I've bought legal an' above-board? I can only tell honest 'ow I bought 'im, an' show my legal receipt as proves what I say. *I'm* civil enough to the genelman," I says, "ain't I?"

'"Oh yes, o' course," says the sec't'ry. "D'ye mind lettin' me look at that receipt again? No doubt we'll come to an arrangement."

'"There's the receipt, sir," I says; "I'm quite willin' to trust it to you as an honourable genelman," I says.

'So the sec't'ry 'as another look at the receipt, an' "Just excuse us a moment, Mr. Wragg," he says, an' 'e goes aside with the toff an' begins talkin' it over quiet, while I lit up an' 'ad my whisky an' soda. I should think it was a bob cigar. I could just 'ear a word 'ere an' there—"No help for it," "That's how it stands legally," "Think yourself lucky," an' so on. An' at last they comes over an' the sec't'ry says, "Well, Mr. Wragg," he says, "there's no doubt the dog's legally yours, as you say, but this gentleman's willing to buy him of you, and give you a good profit on your bargain. What do you say?"

'"Why," I says, "'e ain't for sale. You can see it plain enough on the catalogue."

'"Oh yes, of course, I know that," says the sec't'ry. "But we're men of the world here, men of business—none more so than

yourself, I 'm sure—and we can make a deal, no doubt. What do you say to twenty pounds?"

'"What?" says I. "Twenty pound? An' the genelman 'isself said the dawg was worth a hundred an' fifty this very minute? Is it likely?" says I. 'Ad 'im there, I think. "It ain't reasonable," I says.

'"H'm!" says the sec't'ry. "He certainly did say something about the dog being valuable. But just think. It can't be worth much to you, with no pedigree."

'"It 's worth jist what it 'll fetch to me," I says, "an' no less."

'"Just so," the sec't'ry says, "but nobody'll give you much for it with no pedigree, except this gentleman. And, remember, you got it cheap enough."

'"Well, I dunno about cheap," I says. "'E 's bin a deal of trouble to bring on an' git in condition," I says.

'"Come, then," says the sec't'ry, "put your own price on 'im. Now!"

'"I don't want to be 'ard on the gent," I says, "an' seeing 'e 's took sich a fancy to the little dawg I 'll do 'im a favour. I 'll make a

big reduction on the price 'e put on 'im 'isself. A hundred pound buys 'im."

'When 'e 'eard that the toff bounces round an' grabs 'is 'at. "I won't be robbed twice like that," 'e says, "if I lose five hundred dogs." An' I begun to think I might ha' ventured a bit too 'igh. "I won't submit to it," says 'e.

'"Wait a moment," says the sec't'ry, soothin' like. "Mr. Wragg 's open to reason, I 'm sure. You see, Mr. Wragg, the gentleman won't go anything like as high, and if *he* won't, nobody will. You won't take twenty. Let 's say thirty, an' finish the business."

'Well, we goes on 'agglin' till at last we settles it at fifty.

'"All right," I says, when I see it wouldn't run to no more. "'Ave it yer own way. I don't want to stand in the way of a genelman as is took sich a fancy to a little dawg—I 'm so sentimental over a dawg myself," I says.

'So the toff, he pulls out 'is cheque-book an' writes out a cheque on the spot. "There," says the sec't'ry, "that little misunderstanding 's settled, an' I congratulate you two gentlemen. You 've made a very smart bargain,

Mr. Wragg, an' you've got a dog, sir, that I hope will repay you well!"

'An' so the toff went off with the little dawg, an' I went off with the fifty quid, both well pleased enough. An' the dawg *did* pay 'im well, as you can remember. 'E was a lucky chap, was that toff. *I* never see sich a good dawg bought so cheap before. I ought to ha' got more for 'im, I think—but there, I *am* so sentimental about a dawg!'

## CHARLWOOD WITH A NUMBER

MR. ROBERT CHARLWOOD'S house was the curiosity of its neighbourhood. It was a comfortable and well-conditioned house enough, standing in ground of its own, topmost on the hill of a high London suburb. But Mr. Charlwood had crowned the house (and consequently the hill) with curious superstructures, square, pointed, domed, ribbed, zinc-covered, pierced with apertures of weird design; structures some of which, it was reported, had been observed, in the twilight and dark of clear evenings, to shift and turn about on their axes, by the operation of no visible agency. Also there was a strange and contorted construction, like a pile of vast canisters, which clung irregularly to one side of the house, and was alleged to be a covered staircase leading from Mr. Charlwood's study to the roof. All of which prodigies were ex-

plained by the simple fact that Mr. Charlwood was an astronomer.

It might be said—it was said, in fact—that Mr. Charlwood was not so much a great as a persistent astronomer ; I have heard it more than hinted, indeed, that he was not a great astronomer at all. Such rumours as these never disturbed him, however, because he never heard them; for he was an astronomical hermit. A more than middle-aged, quite well-to-do, and not particularly ascetic hermit, but a hermit nevertheless. He wrote and printed a great many capital letters after his name, of which few people could guess the precise significance. These letters cost him a good number of guineas a year, for they were the initials of all sorts of societies, membership in which was strictly confined to any gentlemen who would pay the subscriptions. Some came quite reasonable, considering the number of letters, and the dearest were only five guineas per annum. I heard of one, indeed, which gave you four initials for a guinea, but this was a very common affair, and I believe Mr. Charlwood's letters of honour averaged out at fourteen and nine-

pence apiece, taking one with another; a far more respectable price, though not at all excessive.

He was the author of many contributions to the chief scientific journals, their inability to print which—for reasons they carelessly left unexplained—caused great regret to the editors; and his lecture explaining eclipses, before the Parson's Green Debating Society, greatly stirred that learned body. On one occasion a daily newspaper had actually printed a letter from him giving the time and particulars of the appearances of a curious light in the sky, thought possibly to have been a manifestation of the *Aurora Borealis*; and there is every reason to believe that the same newspaper would also have published his account of his observation, through his large telescope, of an extraordinary ascending flight of meteors, if he had sent it; and he would undoubtedly have sent it but for a certain misgiving ensuing on his descent from the observatory and his reception of a report that the kitchen chimney had been on fire. 'It's a mercy the fire-engines haven't been here, sir,' his housekeeper said;

'the sparks were enough to bring 'em five miles.'

It was to the management of this Mrs. Page, his housekeeper, that Mr. Charlwood owed the equable regularity of his life. He was wholly unconscious of the debt, and by years of use and habit he had grown to regard his household as a sort of unchanging, pre-ordained Planetary System. Mrs. Page, the cook, the two housemaids, and the parlourmaid were all elderly and long-established servants, and so was the gardener and odd-man. They revolved decorously and punctually about himself, the sun of the system; the resulting phenomena of shaving-water, breakfast, lunch, tea, dinner, dusting, firelighting and lawn-mowing occurring with the exact and mechanical precision of the tides, the seasons, and the phases of the moon. There was an occasional eclipse, in the form of a chimney-sweeping or spring cleaning, and the kitchenmaid and the boot-boy came and went and changed erratically; but Mr. Charlwood saw little of them, and regarded them merely as irresponsible comets, with irregular orbits, striking in from outer

space and away again, with no material disturbance to the solid planets about him. So he went his unchanging way, sleeping, rising, shaving, eating, reading, writing, astronomising, all to the tick of the clock, and one day and the next were as like as two full moons. Mrs. Page, visibly and invisibly, inspired and regulated the system throughout, and the smallest change in the exact order of the daily round would have affected Mr. Charlwood much as an astral catastrophe would have affected the tables in the Nautical Almanac. For many years, however, Mrs. Page saw that nothing so offensive as change of the smallest sort occurred in the Charlwood system.

But at last things began to go wrong suddenly. Mr. Charlwood descended to the bathroom one morning, and there found the wrong soap. There was nothing to complain of in the soap itself—indeed, it was a cake of the same kind that had always occupied the soap-dish in his bedroom wash-stand—but it was not the sort of soap that ancient custom had sanctified for Mr. Charlwood's bathroom use. That was in a square cake, and this was oval. That was white, and

this was pink; moreover, the smell was altogether different. Mr. Charlwood did not discover the anomaly till he was in the bath, and it was too late to complain; and after he was dressed it slipped his memory till he beheld the same soap in the same place the next morning. It was annoying and distressing, but he somehow forgot it again.

At any rate he forgot it till lunch, when the claret reminded him. It was cold—it positively chilled the teeth; and if one thing had been more regular than another in Mr. Charlwood's house, it was the temperature of Mr. Charlwood's claret. He reproved the parlourmaid, and sent it away, but his lunch was wholly ruined.

Mrs. Page presented herself after lunch, and apologised. She had been in the habit of seeing to the proper warming of the claret, it seemed, but to-day something had distracted her attention, and she had forgotten it.

Mr. Charlwood sat indignant, but far more amazed. It was as though the Pole Star had 'forgotten' its correct place at the tip of the Little Bear's tail. Cold claret—it seemed an impossibility; yet here it was. And at dinner

that evening it came up—how do you think? Hot, sir, literally hot; parboiled! The whole thing was an outrage on the laws of nature. But even worse was to follow. When he demanded Mrs. Page, he was told that she had just 'stepped out.' The chief planet of the system had just 'stepped out' of its orbit—had gone swirling off into space in flat defiance of the law of gravitation! Mr. Charlwood bounced angrily into his study, and there found—no matches on the mantelpiece!

When he could consider these abnormities with some degree of calmness, it seemed clear enough that something must be wrong with Mrs. Page; and yet it could scarcely be her health, or she would not have gone out. He resolved to demand an explanation in the morning.

In the morning, however, she forestalled him by asking for a few days' leave. She got the question out—very anxiously and gulpily, it is true—before he had time to open his inquiries, and, having heard it, he was dumb for half a minute, losing all hold of his ideas. Imagine asking Jupiter to give an indefinite holiday to his largest moon!

When he found his voice, it was a voice of scandalised protest. 'Mrs. Page!' he said, 'Mrs. Page! Really I don't understand this extraordinary state of things. What do you mean by it?'

Mrs. Page's mouth screwed down at the corners, and her eyes—rather red and heavy, he noticed now—grew pleading and watery. 'I—I don't like to ask you, sir,' said Mrs. Page, 'and I 've put it off as long as I could, but I must ask you to let me go now. I 'll see the cook, and——'

'But what, Mrs. Page—why—what is the reason of this extraordinary—this—in short, Mrs. Page, what is your explanation?'

'Well, sir, I didn't want to mention it, not wishing to trouble you, as you didn't know; but it 's my mother.'

'Your *mother*, Mrs. Page?'

'Yes, sir.' Mrs. Page, tearful of eye, spoke with an air of meek apology for having been born of woman.

Mr. Charlwood's surprise was complete. Mrs. Page was certainly as old as himself, and *his* mother was no more than a recollection of childhood. There was something difficult to

believe—something vaguely ridiculous—about Mrs. Page's tardy retention of a mother.

'Then, what is it, Mrs. Page? Why must you go because of your—your mother?'

'She's an invalid, sir, and—got nobody to look after her for the present, and I—I—oh, I don't know what I shall do!' And here Mrs. Page broke down wholly and dabbed her red eyes with a fistful of wet pocket-handkerchief.

Mr. Charlwood regarded his housekeeper with blank astonishment. She was exhibiting phenomena altogether foreign to his experience of planets. He asked more questions, and so the tale came out disconnectedly in sobs and jerks.

Mrs. Page's mother had been left a widow only a little earlier than Mrs. Page herself. Of late years she had become bedridden with spine trouble, and, to the worse of that, was nearly blind. Mrs. Page had taken lodgings for her, and a woman had been paid to give her attention; but now the small savings of mother and daughter had at length given out, and the attendant was gone; and it was Mrs. Page's present care to move her mother to cheaper lodgings, if such could be found, and

in some way to attempt the impossible in the way of providing attendance on her. This must be the work of a few days, and Mrs. Page humbly and tearfully, but with more insistence than she had ever dared to use to her employer before, protested that she really must go.

So much Mr. Charlwood gathered from Mrs. Page's faltering apologetics, but she said nothing of the weeks of deepening apprehension which had preceded the crisis, while the last few sovereigns, feebly reinforced by the last month's wages, had been melting fast; nor of the sleepless, sore-eyed nights given to helpless scheming of hopeless expedients. And Mr. Charlwood was not the man to figure them in his imagination, for, in truth, that was not a quality wherewith he was vastly endowed. So he replied with dignified asperity.

'Have you considered, Mrs. Page,' he said, 'what—ah—extreme difficulty and inconvenience, and, in fact, positive annoyance, your absence would cause to the—to me?'

Yes, it seemed that Mrs. Page had considered this, and was very sorry. But she had made arrangements to mitigate the inconveni-

ence as far as possible, and—in short, she really must go. Mr. Charlwood's amazement increased; he began to realise that his housekeeper was insisting—was growing firm—dictatorial. This was disconcerting—even alarming. Mr. Charlwood suddenly grew aware that a vast deal more of his habitual well-being than he could risk depended wholly on his housekeeper; he positively could not afford to offend her. What was to be done?

The sooner this nuisance was got rid of the better. He reflected that when a similar difficulty arose in a matter of astronomy—when one planet of a system was observed to be distracted from its proper orbit by the influence of some unknown object outside the system, every astronomer turned his telescope in the direction of the unknown object in the hope of seeing it. It was all he had to guide him, and time was precious. He pushed his chair back and rose.

'Very well, Mrs. Page,' he said. 'Get your bonnet at once. I will come with you and see this mother of yours!'

Mrs. Page's red eyes opened wide. Hers was the amazement now. She stammered the

beginnings of protest and then was silent. Could it be that Mr. Charlwood doubted her word?

'I will come and see this mother of yours, Mrs. Page!' he repeated.

Mrs. Page left the room with something of a woebegone flounce.

At the foot of the hill, where the houses stood smaller and thicker, a street led out of the main road, and another street led out of that. The end of this street was in another, wherein, if you turned to the right, you proceeded to I don't know where, and if you turned to the left, you could get no farther, because the street ended in a blind wall. At the end little house, next the blind wall, in a back room up the one flight of stairs, Mrs. Page's old mother lay pallid and helpless and all but blind on a clean little bed on an iron bedstead with thin and staggering legs. So Mr. Charlwood and his housekeeper found her half an hour after their morning conversation. Most things in the room were difficult to distinguish at first, for the blind was drawn; but the white of the bed was distinct enough, and

on that another white—the old woman's face, hard and sharp and shocking, with eyes all but closed by lids that trembled unceasingly.

'Is that you, Martha?' came a querulous voice from the bed. 'A nice time to leave me here like this, I must say, and not a soul to do a thing for me!'

Mrs. Page bent and kissed the drawn face, quickly whispering something in which Mr. Charlwood could distinguish nothing but his own name. The twist of pain that abode ever on the grey face deepened at the words, and the old woman made what seemed a great effort to sit up, ending in a short groan.

'And pray,' came the sharp voice again, 'pray, may I ask why Mr. Charlwood is so good as to pay me this uninvited visit?'

Mrs. Page stooped again and murmured some agonised entreaty, but the helpless woman in the bed went on.

'I cannot pretend that the time is convenient,' she said. 'And I hope it is not at your request, Martha. Mr. Charlwood is surely aware that the temporary circumstances which have induced you to accept a position in his household, and which have made it con-

venient for me to occupy these very inadequate lodgings, are not such as would warrant any attitude of patronage on his part.'

Mrs. Page left the bed-head and returned to Mr. Charlwood by the door, pleading in whispers. 'Please go, sir,' she begged. 'She doesn't know; she doesn't understand—I 've never told her quite how things are, and she 's been used to something different; pray forgive her, Mr. Charlwood, and—and don't stay. You see it 's true—I must do something, though I don't know what. Please leave me with her.'

Mr. Charlwood found himself on the stairs, with some confused consciousness of a novel insignificance. He had been ordered out of the room by his own housekeeper, and had meekly obeyed her. His dignity being so far abused, it would suffer no more if he sat on the stairs to think it over; so he sat and tried. But through all he was oppressed by the memory of that grey-white face, with the trembling eyelids, that lay in the little room behind him. He had put himself in a false position, that was clear. And it would never do to part with Mrs. Page—that would mean a disloca-

tion of the domestic system beyond the horror of dreams. But what could be done? He was unaccustomed to difficulties of this sort. Could any astronomical analogy help him? When the outer planet Uranus was observed to be disturbed in its orbit by something still beyond it, that something was straightway included in the community of the planets and given its proper place and name in the Solar System. Perhaps there might be a hint in that. And—really, he was oddly impressed by that white face with the near-closed eyes. Furthermore, he must no longer submit to the dictation of his housekeeper; he must retrieve his dignity and reassert his authority. As to that he was resolved.

He rose straightway and knocked at the door of the bedroom. The door opened a little way, and Mrs. Page's face appeared.

'Just come here, if you please, Mrs. Page,' said Mr. Charlwood, with firm authority; 'and shut the door behind you.'

Mrs. Page complied, fearful and pleading of eye as ever.

'I cannot waste more time waiting here, Mrs. Page.'

'N-no, sir.'

'Therefore you will be so good as take certain instructions before I go; instructions which I must insist on your carrying out without delaying longer here. Now as to the second spare bedroom, next your own, I wish a fire to be lighted there instantly, to air the room.'

'Yes, sir—but won't you please tell——'

'I 'll tell nobody but you, Mrs. Page, and I expect you to see that my orders are obeyed. Next, now, I wish you to take a note, which I will write, to Dr. Greig.'

'Y-yes, sir.'

'In pursuance of instructions conveyed in that note, Dr. Greig will send a trained nurse up to the house, who will stay there, and whom I shall expect you to accommodate suitably. Also he will send *here* an invalid carriage, with attendants, which you must meet, and see without fail that your mother is placed in it with every care. You understand—with every care.'

'My mother, sir? O Mr. Charlwood, you —don't—don't mean——'

'I mean, Mrs. Page, that you are *not* to have the leave you applied for, to attend to

your mother. I refuse it, utterly. I require your attendance at my house, and in order that you shall have no excuse for leaving it, your mother is to occupy the room which I have requested you to have aired at once. That is all, Mrs. Page, except that I shall be glad of pen and ink, if I am to write the note to Dr. Greig.'

'O Mr. Charlwood—Mr. Charlwood, I shall pray for you night and day!'

'I shall need it—I shall need it, Mrs. Page, if my claret is to be frozen and boiled alternately, and the wrong soap put in the bath-room, while you are running about visiting your mother!'

'And oh, sir, after what she said, too——'

'Said? What she said? She never spoke to *me*, Mrs. Page, as you must know. And as to anything she may have said to you, do you suppose I should listen, or should remember it if I heard it? Really, Mrs. Page—really, you—ah—now *where* is that pen and ink?'

That day the Charlwood system was worse disturbed than ever, and every orbit was irregular. No stellar system can endure the

sudden introduction of two new planets and a frequent comet—Dr. Greig was surprisingly like a comet—without some temporary disturbance of its arrangements. So that Mr. Charlwood found the observatory a welcome refuge from the turmoil, and went there early. He went there early, looked up, and saw a marvel.

For there in the heavens stood and twinkled a new star—a star where no star had been before. Truly indeed it was a new star—one of those stars that open out suddenly in the vastness above and there remain to puzzle the learned.

If I were an astronomer like Mr. Charlwood I would offer you some theory of these new stars: as it is, I can only tell you the facts of this, Mr. Charlwood's one scientific discovery.

Of course other astronomers saw the star too, that night, and carefully noted its exact position; but it was Mr. Charlwood who got his letter into the newspapers first—he took a cab to all the offices and himself dropped a report at each—and so they called the star after him. It was strictly called Charlwood with a number which I cannot tell you, being

no astronomer, but generally it was Charlwood, simply; and it was Mr. Charlwood's joy to know that he had not lived in vain.

Mrs. Page's mother died not very long after her removal, and the nurse went away. And now I believe even Mr. Charlwood himself has been dead some time; but his star twinkles steadily in the place where it first added its tiny light to the sparkling sky.

# A POOR BARGAIN

## I

THE indolent traveller might not have guessed the village in which Daniel Piker lived and considered his problems—they called it Thorpe Dedham—to be a place where problems were bred; but if he had had Piker's brickfield to manage, as well as his little farm and his chandler's shop, he would have learned better.

They were all little—the village, the brick-field, the farm, and the chandler's shop; and the indolent traveller, if he could be got to think about them, might call Piker's problems little, too. But in the total they meant a deal to Piker; and their successful little solutions were aiding, slowly but very surely, in the building up of the little fortune which most assuredly must some day crown Piker's efforts. Further, there came a day when to the rest was added the problem of Piker's aunt.

Thorpe Dedham was not so very far from London, when you found it—after much trouble—on the map. It might have been twenty-five miles, as the crow flies, or it might even have been a little less; but the quickest journey between the two, on solid earth, took a lot out of a day. The nearest railway station to Thorpe Dedham was five miles away, and when you reached it you would not find it a very useful station. For most of the day it was shut up; and when a train did stop it was a discouraging train, which puffed and dawdled feebly along for eight miles at right angles to the direction favoured by the crow, till it reached the junction where you missed the London train.

So that there was no great flow of traffic between London and Thorpe Dedham; and any person who had once performed the journey thought about it a good deal before he did it again. The place, in fact, was just too far from the capital for the suburban trains, and just too near for those on the main lines. It lay, moreover, between two of these lines, in a part of the country which some called deadly dull, and which was, with-

out a doubt, commercially poor. Nevertheless, by a strict attention to his little problems, Daniel Piker was doing very well in his little way. The problem of getting men to work his brickfield and farm for lower wages than was usual he solved with comparative ease, for work was scarce thereabout; and the problem of making them return those wages at his chandler's shop, buying articles of whatever quality he chose to give for whatever prices he chose to charge, was not so much more difficult as you might expect. This is a free country, and a man can always be discharged on the legal notice, though such extreme measures can be made unnecessary by a little foresight; for it needs no more than to be a bit easy with your credit for a week or two, and you get your man so far in debt that, with a little management, he never quite gets out again. And you can always keep him tame by threatening to stop his tick—a thing you have a perfect right to do in a free country.

If Piker's business had been transferred to America, and multiplied by about a million, it would have been called a Trust. As it was, its figures stopped a long way short of

millions and even thousands, and Piker was too busy making it pay to bother about calling it anything in particular. His little projects were generally accomplished in good and paying terms; and none had involved actual defeat except that of getting the local doctor to pay a commission on his receipts from Piker's men and their families. As to that, he never forgave the doctor. It wouldn't have been much, and whatever it was might easily have been added to the bills. Clearly the doctor was no man of business.

And now arose the question of Piker's aunt. She was dying, and the problem, of course, was to make it pay. Piker's aunt Sarah shared the common lot of aunts; being suspected, by her relations, of hidden wealth—cloudy, indefinite, speculative wealth, but wealth undoubtedly. She was the widow of a small tradesman in London, and she lived in lodgings in Wandsworth.

In Piker's family wealth was counted, as I have hinted, not in thousands, but in hundreds; and when Piker labelled his aunt with her probable figure—in his mind he labelled everybody with a probable figure—he never ventured

beyond the higher hundreds, for he had a rather superstitious dread of expecting too much.

The problem of making Aunt Sarah pay was exacerbated by a grand-niece of hers, a shop-girl in London, who had the advantage of being nearer the prey. It was because of this danger that Piker ventured the extravagance of two journeys to London, paying a return fare of four-and-sixpence each time. On the first of these journeys he found his aunt looking exceedingly pale, and feeling very bad, so that he returned quite happy, being especially encouraged by his aunt's complaints that her grand-niece was neglecting her. For it seemed that the thoughtless girl failed to come and tend her relation, spite of having nearly an hour to herself every night from the shop only a few miles off, at Peckham.

Piker expressed a proper and moral reprobation of such sinful callousness, and went away a good deal happier about his four-and-sixpence. A man of forty whose habits incline him to take a vast deal of trouble to gain a shilling does not gladly let slip four of them,

and a sixpence over, except upon a clear probability of consequent profit.

The second visit was more eventful. The old woman was very bad indeed now, and the doctor gave so little hope that Piker grew very hopeful. He was a most portentous doctor, who, if he rarely cured his patients, never failed to impress them.

Piker met him on the stairs, and in reply to his inquiries the doctor said—

'Ha, hum, hum! This is not a case in which I can conscientiously give you any reasonable expectation of your aunt's recovery—hum! When we have pernicious anæmia in a person of your aunt's age, and when we also have concurrently an enlargement of the lymphatic glands of obscure causation—hum—then we have not far to look for the end. Hum! About a fortnight, I should say. Hum!'

Piker, therefore, greeted his dear aunt with very great affection. She lay extraordinarily pale and languid, and talked feebly and peevishly. She was angrier than ever with her grand-niece, whom it seemed she now suspected of more affection for 'the fellers'

than for her invalid aunt; and, withal, she had grown suddenly sentimental on the subject of her birthplace.

'I 'd 'a' liked to 'a' seen Thorpe Dedham again 'fore I went,' she said. 'But it ain't to be. I 'eard the doctor talkin' to you outside. 'E said a fortnight. I 'eard 'im. But it won't be as long. That I 'm sure of.'

Piker said something quite dutiful, though not entirely true, about hoping it would be a great deal longer; but the old woman's thin face shook in an emphatic negative.

'No, no,' she said, 'it won't. People as bad as me knows well enough. I shan't last much more 'n a week, Dan, an' p'raps I shan't see you again. I want you to promise to do something when I 'm gone.'

Piker was ready to promise anything—a promise was perfectly safe.

'I want to be put away in the churchyard at Thorpe Dedham. I 've made a will for you to do it. What money I 've got is to go to you, if you 'll have me buried decent at Thorpe Dedham. That 's all the conditions. You 'll do that, won't you?'

Piker promised, with something perilously like joyful alacrity.

'There ain't so much as there was,' the old woman went on, 'but I don't owe nothing out o' what there is. Feel under the pillow.'

Piker did so, and presently drew forth a grubby, dog-biscuit-coloured savings-bank book and a little canvas bag.

'All right; put the bag back,' Aunt Sarah said. 'That's a pound or two loose just to pay for things. Look in the book. It ought to be jist over a 'undred and twenty now.'

It was one hundred and twenty pounds fifteen shillings, in exact figures. Piker experienced mingled feelings—some gratification, for this was certainly an amount worth having; and some disappointment, for it was very low in the hundreds indeed. He resolved to do the funeral at the cheapest possible figure.

'The will you'll find all right,' Aunt Sarah concluded. 'I'll see about that. It's what I said—all to you, provided you bury me at Thorpe Dedham, near mother. An' now I'm tired; an' I think I can sleep a little. Good-bye, Dan, my boy, an' God bless ye.'

Well, it seemed certain that there was to be

a fair profit out of Aunt Sarah, after all, if not a vast one. Piker saw the landlady before he left, and intrusted her with six penny stamps. One was to be used to communicate with him as soon as it was clear that the old lady could last no more than twenty-four hours. But if the break-up came suddenly, then the landlady was authorised and empowered to squander the whole six on a telegram.

Piker was most friendly and gracious with the landlady, but he did not mean to leave her alone with Aunt Sarah's possessions if he could help it. Also there was the grand-niece to bear in mind.

## II

Piker began his journey home in a rather happy frame of mind, but he finished it in perplexity and alarm.

As a prudent man of business he dropped in at the undertaker's on the way to the railway station, to ascertain the very lowest, derry-down, rock-bottom cut price for a plain coffin and laying out, delivered complete, with corpse enclosed, free on rail at St. Pancras.

The result made him very uncomfortable. At first he received the estimates with airy derision, explaining that he didn't want gold lining and nails jewelled in four holes, but soon it grew plain that the thing really was going to run into money; and then his facetiousness turned to positive gloom. Moreover, not an undertaker of them all would even consider his proposal to give the corpse's old clothes in whole or part payment, but themselves grew derisive—even indignant—at the suggestion.

At first he had even indulged the hope that an undertaker might exist from whom actual cash profit might be derived in the matter of those old clothes, over and above the cost of the coffin, seeing that the coffin itself might be of any quality or none; but now it grew clear that, on the contrary, the coffin was going to cost a good deal more than it seemed to be worth. Piker fell to calculating prime costs with such results that he set aside for future consideration the idea of adding a little undertaking trade to the brickfield, the farm, and the chandler's shop.

As if the undertaker's estimates were not

sufficiently alarming, another blow awaited Piker at the railway station. He had assumed that a corpse, properly packed in a coffin, would travel at goods rates; but an inquiry elicited the staggering information that the carriage would come to thirty-three shillings!

The thing seemed so absurd that Piker ventured to reprove the official for his obvious ignorance of the company's regulations, since he, Piker, alive and well, could travel the distance for exactly one-twelfth of the sum, with a liability on the company in case of accident, which, for obvious reasons, they need not fear in the case of a corpse. But all for naught; for the impatient official, thrusting his finger into the midst of a great printed column of charges and regulations, withdrew to his work, and left the dismayed Piker to face the indubitable, printed, exorbitant black-and-white fact that the unblushing charge for the conveyance of a corpse was truly and actually a shilling a mile.

Poor Piker entered the train a gloomy and soured legatee; and he reached Thorpe Dedham at last to find occasion for more

sourness and increased gloom. For he there ascertained that though the burial fees for a person dying in the parish were moderate, those for an imported corpse were a very different matter. Altogether it would seem that Aunt Sarah was bent on dying with every circumstance of wicked extravagance. It was a cruel thing that the brutal undertaker, the bloated and callous railway company, and now the very parson and churchwardens, should thus conspire to oppress the bereaved. Daniel Piker was wrung to the heart.

He poured out his griefs before his wife, but got no sympathy of practical value. Mrs. Piker was not a woman of intellect, and Piker had married her because it came cheaper than keeping a servant. Still, it is a hard thing if a man's wife cannot lighten his afflictions; and Piker realised it sadly now, when the rapacity of his fellow-men grieved his soul.

But light was coming—light in the depths of Piker's darkness. In the midst of his gloomy cogitations there came an idea—a flash of inspiration. Like all great ideas, it seemed so simple that he marvelled it had not come

sooner. Why not bring Aunt Sarah alive? Her fare as a corpse would be thirty-three shillings; as a living person, two and ninepence—a clear saving of one pound ten and threepence to begin with. Even allowing three shillings for a cab to the station, the saving would be one pound seven and threepence. Then she would die in Thorpe Dedham parish, and down would come the burial fees to a mere fraction. And again, those ravening harpies the London undertakers would be bilked completely. And the carpenter at Thorpe Dedham could do a very nice coffin to set off against his bill for groceries, or should have his credit stopped forthwith.

Nothing troubled Piker but his unaccountable slowness in perceiving this brilliant way out of his difficulties. At any rate, no more time should be lost, for now his sole fear was lest it might be found wholly impossible to move the old lady. So he sent off a letter by the evening post, and prepared to follow it in the morning. This was the letter:—

'My dear Aunt,—It grieved me much to see you so low to-day, and I been thinking

particular about your wanting to see Thorpe Dedham once more. Dear aunt leave it all to me and I will come to-morrow first train, and I have no doubt the change will restore you to health as it leaves me at present. The best cab in London is not too good for you, dear aunt, and money will never be no object to me when you are consurned. So no more as it leaves me at present hoping to see you first rate to-morrow.—Your affectnt. nephew,

DANIEL.'

This letter, read to her by the landlady, at first prostrated and then amazingly inspirited Aunt Sarah; so much so that although she began by protesting it would be instant death if she moved, when Piker arrived he was astonished—one would not say disconcerted—to find her sitting up in a mummy-like roll of shawls and blankets, wherein she had been endued, under her own imperative orders, by the landlady.

The cab may not have been the best in London, but it was good enough; and the invalid's transfer to the train was effected with no greater disorder than Piker's inevitable dis-

pute with the cabman. But the journey, as a whole, was rather too much for the old lady, and she collapsed alarmingly ere the train reached its destination.

Piker's spring-cart was waiting, however, and the day was fine ; Aunt Sarah, a helpless bundle, was hoisted into the bottom of the cart, and there propped and wedged among sacks, shawls, and pillows, limp and silent.

But a mile or two of jolting so far roused her that presently she asked faintly : ‘ Dan! Is that the old Blue Lion I can see the roof of, just in front?’

‘Yes,’ Piker answered, a little surprised ; ‘that 's the Blue Lion right enough.’

‘An' do they still 'ave Bingham's Old Stingo there?’

‘Why, yes, I b'lieve so.’

‘Pull up, Dan! I 'll 'ave a pint o' Bingham's Old Stingo if I die in this 'ere cart for it!’

Now there is no end to this little story. For it is within a fortnight of two years ago since his Aunt Sarah came to stay with Piker at Thorpe Dedham, and he now faces the appalling fact that at this moment she is the

very healthiest and toughest old lady in that very healthy village.

Whether it was the mere change of air and diet that did it, the escape from the London doctor, the return to her native surroundings, Bingham's Old Stingo, or something of all four together, are problems with which Piker is only vaguely concerned; for the solid problem which never leaves his mind is: what on earth is he to do?

The will is still in his favour, with the old proviso; but he calculates that his aunt's visit has cost him very nearly the value of the legacy already. Yet if he does anything which may offend the old lady—let alone turning her out—that legacy will go at once, of course, and the whole transaction will stand a dead loss.

On the other hand, Aunt Sarah has a most enormous appetite, and may live for twenty years. The problem is one requiring thought, and Piker gives it so much that it is only at rare intervals that he has time to remember, with an added pang, that the Wandsworth landlady never returned those six stamps.

# STATEMENT OF EDWARD CHALONER

AT the time of your visit to this institution, I promised you, sir, that I would write a simple statement of my case, and you on your part promised to read it attentively, with a view to supplementing your judgment upon my state of mind. I fear that I cannot be certain that it will reach you, since one of the chief torments of my horrible position is, that anything I propose, or any wish I may express, is met with a soothing verbal compliance, which means nothing in practice, and is merely designed to keep me quiet. I make no doubt that such procedure is humane and politic in the cases of the unfortunate people about me, but to myself, a sane man (are there no words by which I can convince my fellow-creatures of this fact?) it is so great an aggravation of my torture that I sometimes fear that it alone will drive me into

that state of lunacy of which I am wrongly accused. For it places me as a man is placed in a nightmare, who sees objects which recede everywhere from his touch, so that he seems to be cut off and insulated wholly from the universe about him by some impalpable (and yet how fearfully palpable!) vapour or atmosphere; something that yields everywhere, but is none the less impenetrable. But I rely on your promise to read my statement, and in the last resort on your friendship with Dr. Wilsey, which may induce you to ask for the paper if merely as a matter of curiosity. And if the fact may be, sir, that you have read so far purely from such motives of idle curiosity, I do now most earnestly implore you to give me better attention for the rest; for I do assure you that for me more depends on it than man may express: a matter far beyond a mere affair of life and death, as you will presently understand.

It is one of the worst torments of a man in my position that the more frequently and the more earnestly he protests his sanity the less attention he receives. His very protestations are taken merely as so many additional proofs

of the supposed disease of his mind, and the desperate vehemence of his appeals is regarded as evidence of the severity of his affliction. So that I shall endeavour to refrain from such protestations and appeals, so far as the natural impulses of a wronged man may be controlled. But I will ask you to search your recollection with care, and find, if you can, one single evidence of insanity in my part of the long conversation we had together a few days back. Indeed, you virtually admitted, at the time, that you could detect nothing of the sort. But I know well enough what is said—what was told you, I have no doubt, out of my hearing. It is said that I am afflicted with monomania; that I am sane enough in all matters but one —that of my own identity. I am held to be some unknown person who has taken the name of Edward Chaloner. But that is my name, my own given name, and the name I was born to bear. I have been dispossessed, thrust out of the very life my Maker gave me, by a devilry which I cannot explain, nor even comprehend; and a creature, a thing, a something, is walking the earth free, in my place and with my name.

Sir, I offer a challenge. I offer a challenge to any living man—to you I proffer the challenge rather as an entreaty. The name and history of Edward Chaloner are easily enough to be ascertained—his birthplace and day, the names of his parents and relations, the particulars of his early life. Let these be ascertained by anybody, and let me be questioned—cross-examined. If I fail to answer accurately even to the smallest particular, I will protest and struggle no more; I will sink back silent into the hell I live in to wait for the release of death; unless it be—and this is my fearfullest thought—that by the operation of the horrid bedevilment that encompasses me, I am to be denied this last blessing, the simple human blessing of death.

I have made the challenge before; I have poured out the story of my early life—dates, names, everything—in the ears of anybody who would listen; but all to no effect. My words are speculated upon curiously, as prompted perhaps by a madman's cunning, perhaps by delusion fed by chance knowledge in days of sanity, perhaps by some unusual freak of telepathic cerebration; always from

the fixed and immovable assumption that I am mad. But I beg—I demand—that the matter be tested; tested with the last and most minute severity that human ingenuity may attain.

My name, as I have said, is Edward Chaloner. My early life was passed in the comfort of a moderate prosperity, and this continued till some little while after my marriage. But then, with a young wife dependent on me, and the future of a family to provide for, I fell upon such a series of misfortunes as left me penniless. It is needless for my purpose to detail those misfortunes here, but please note that I am ready, dispossessed as I am of all papers and memoranda, to give so close and accurate an account of those misfortunes as alone should establish the identity I claim.

It was in these circumstances that I first became fully aware of the fact that the civilised part of the world, with all its high pretensions and illusory ideals, is the mere creature and slave of money, by, with, and for which the life that is called civilised is conducted. I need not argue the question with a man of intelligence like yourself, whose sole doubt will

be that I could have lived so long without observing the fact; the truth being that my easy life had given me little occasion to remark it. I discovered, now, that I and my little family were wholly friendless; and, being so forcibly taught that a man's only true friend is the money in his pocket, I resolved to devote myself utterly to the making of money, until such time as I could once again face the world on even terms.

I have heard it said that a man will gain the esteem of the world by the possession of money, no matter by what methods it may be accumulated, so long as his operations do not bring him into gaol. But I think the exception is ill-reasoned, for I believe that the thieves who go to prison are not despised for their imprisonment, nor for their thievery, but for the beggarly sums they derive from it; and I am convinced that if a burglar could steal (and *keep*) half a million of money at the cost of five years' penal servitude, he would be greatly respected and sought after on his release. But notwithstanding these views—or rather because of them—in my money-making I resolved to be scrupulous; scrupulous, that

is, to the degree of doing nothing for which the law might get a hold of me; and I kept my resolve with great care.

With this sole restriction I gave myself wholly to the getting of money, and I succeeded. You must not suppose me a man of a naturally avaricious temperament. My wife and my children were more to me than myself, and for their sake I went through years of work which, for the time, may have seemed to change my very nature. I went into the city with no money, and I drew my prizes from them that speculàte and invest. At first I acted on behalf of another, handling work which he did not wish to be seen to touch, and then, since he could not help it—for I knew awkward things—I became his partner. We 'played the game,' as the expression went, and we did it at great profit. There were times when my wife remonstrated, on some fancied point of honour, so that I lost temper at her ingratitude ; and to some extent we became estranged. But I let it stand, for I had no time then for the family affections, as she might have understood. I saved all for the day when I should be able to quit my money-

making and turn again at last to the wife and children for whose sake I had gone through it all.

People called me hard names, but they were the losers in the game; in general, of course, I was vastly respected, for I had money, and was making more. In time it came to pass that even my partner abused me bitterly, for indeed, seeing my opportunity, I 'played the game' on him, and won. He was inconsistent and illogical, and we separated. And here again, my wife, who had been quieter of late, gave me foolish reproaches, and I struck her. I repented the act as soon as it was done, and I resolved that I would treat her all the more handsomely when this servitude of money-getting was over, and all was made right, as it should be. For her part, I believe she forgave me readily in her mind, but I had an appointment and could not wait to make inquiries.

Unhampered by a timid partner, I was still more successful, and soon the time arrived when I could contemplate a near release from all my labours and struggles. In six crowded years I had made a fortune, and I had managed so well that in all the time, though

many hard things were said, I never once had to face as much as an action for recovery. I set myself to look about for a house in some beautiful part of the country, where I could go with my wife and children, and where we could renew together that happy family life which had been interrupted by my years of fight for the means of their well-being. An excellent house offered, far from London,—a full eight hours' journey, indeed,—a circumstance which I counted a gain, since I designed a total change in my way of life. I bought the property.

House and grounds were admirable, and such alterations and repairs as were needed I set going as once. Twice or thrice I travelled down from London to see that my wishes were being properly carried out, and to give orders as to the placing of the new furniture. For I designed no mere removal, but a beginning afresh of my life where my misfortunes had interrupted it, with no single reminder of the years that had intervened. My children were young still, and indeed my wife was young also, though the few years had aged her strangely. But all should be made well, I was

resolved, in the future; any neglect, any unkindness that had marked those six years should be atoned a hundredfold.

I broke up my London establishment, and sent my family to the seaside for the short period remaining till the new house should be ready; and in the city I busied myself in winding up my affairs. This was readily done in the main, for I had contemplated my retirement for some little time; but one matter detained me longer than I had expected, though the profit was large. It was a matter that could not have been carried through as I did it at any earlier period, for it would have made me so many enemies in the city that I could not have continued business. But, now that my money-getting was coming to a close, I could well afford to do it, and laugh at them all, for I took care that the transaction left me clear beyond the finger-tips of the law; and so I ended my commercial career with a stroke of high profit.

This matter, as I have said, kept me longer than I had expected, and meantime I had arranged that my family should go direct to my new house to await me. But once the

affair was closed, and my last investments safely made, I lost not a second; but caught the express that very night, so that my new life of joy and ease might begin on the morrow.

Of late I had found myself subject to distressing headaches and fits of faintness, the result, doubtless, of too prolonged and unremitting application to business. Perhaps, in view of these ailments, I should have avoided night travelling in a sleeping-saloon, but my eagerness, my longing to find myself once again in the midst of life as I had known it before my business days, overcame all. I engaged both berths of a sleeping compartment, in order to travel alone and undisturbed.

My sleep, such as I had, was a very fury of nightmare. Once or twice I half awoke, and I was then conscious that amid all the roar and oscillation of the carriage my head was aching worse than I had ever known. It was positively ringing with an agony that, lulled as it might be by increasing slumber, was then only exchanged for demoniac sweating dreams. So I lay while there grew upon me a shaking fear

that for long I could not interpret; till at last I found myself floundering from my couch and staring through the dim light at the berth opposite.

There, on the couch that I had last seen flat and empty, lay a muffled figure, with its back turned; and my horror, the fear that was now a choking anguish, was lest the face should turn toward me and the eyes look into mine.

I flung myself back in my berth, and plunged head and shoulders beneath the coverlet. So I lay till my nerves calmed somewhat, and I reflected that no doubt after all this was merely some passenger strayed into the wrong compartment. In a while, though the roar and rattle of the train made my brain throb beyond bearing, I became sufficiently easy to resolve to rise and inform the guard. I got up, therefore, and looked again; but now I could see that the berth was flat and empty as ever.

I decided to attempt no more sleep, but to dress and wash ready to leave the train immediately on its arrival. This I did, but, having done so, I fell straightway into so deep

a lethargy that I remember no more till the guard woke me at my destination.

Wearied and faint, I left the carriage, and directed that the single bag that was all my luggage should be sent on by cart. This settled, I ordered breakfast at the hotel, and made an effort to eat.

I suffered from a faintness and a lassitude of a character novel and strange in my experience. My attempts to eat succeeded only in sickening me, and at last I ordered a cab. I had no vehicle of my own to meet me, for as yet I had bought no horses. That was to make one of the early interests of my new life.

The bright fields and the clear air so far cheered and freshened me that I stopped the cab a mile out of the town and went the remaining mile and a half on foot, gathering a new vigour with every step. I saw my new life beginning before my eyes, and I planned its beginning to the letter. 'My dear wife,' I would say, 'the bad years are gone and forgotten, and you will forgive me for whatever I may have done that has displeased you, for indeed it was all for your sake—yours and your children's. For

your sake and theirs I changed my nature, but now I am renewed, and come to you, your husband of old.' And I would take her in my arms, and my children would climb my knees once again.

So I came to the house at last, and made my way through a side gate, for that was my nearest entrance. I went by a way of yew hedges toward the house front, and presently, as I turned into a path screened only by a larch, I saw my wife walking on the lawn, and my three little ones playing about her. With a full heart, with my hands extended before me, I went toward her, calling her by name.

To my amazement she turned, and, with her children at her side, began to walk toward the house. I mended my pace, and called to the children. My children ran from me terrified, pulling my wife with them by her skirt!

'Muriel!' I cried, 'what is this? Do you turn from me now? Now, when the reward is ours at last?'

She caught the youngest child in her arms, and a man came running from the end of the terrace, with another at his heels. They were men of my own employ, men I had engaged

when last I was there. Yet now they stood before me, unrecognising and insolent, demanding to know my business.

'Muriel!' I cried again. 'Muriel, I have been ill, but am I so much changed? Surely the children must know me?'

And as I said the words there came from the house before me—will you believe the horror?—there came from the house before me the figure of myself! A creature, ghost or devil, in the shape and guise of myself; and my children ran to it and clung about its knees! They clung about its knees, calling it father, and complaining of the strange man who had frightened them!

I stood like a man of stone, and the soul within me shrank and shuddered; for the eyes of this horror were upon me—my own eyes, pitiless and exultant, that searched my spirit through.

What more? Nothing I saw but the eyes, nothing I heard but the names of my children, screamed in a voice I could scarce have guessed my own. I felt nothing of the struggle, nothing of being carried from the place.

And now that I have written it, can I

wonder if even you think me mad? What can I think myself? Is there no test, no unfailing touchstone provided by a merciful God, whereby a man may prove his sanity? Or is the boon withheld because the punishment of hell is a thing of this life after all?

# LOST TOMMY JEPPS

## I

A GUARDIAN angel—no, a legion of them — watches the London railway stations on Bank Holiday mornings. Nobody can doubt it who has seen Stratford Main station at such a time. For there are about half a dozen platforms, with stairs and an underground passage to join them; and all these platforms, as well as the stairs and the passage and the booking-offices, are packed so closely with excited people that there seems to be no room for even a single walking-stick more. The fortunate persons in front stick to the edge of the platform somehow by their heels, in defiance of natural laws. When a train arrives, the people in the booking-office rush at the passage, the people in the passage rush at the stairs, the people on the stairs rush at the platform, and nothing seems left for the people on the platform but slaughter and

destruction, beginning with the equilibrists at the edge. And yet nobody gets killed. Half the people are on the wrong platforms, but are wholly unable to struggle through to the right ones; and I believe the other half are on the wrong platforms too, but don't know it. And yet everybody gets somewhere, eventually.

It is an experience that would test any man's philosophy, and the general good temper is such that, without a doubt, the place is a resort of philosophers of all ages.

There was an August Bank Holiday on which Stratford station was as full of philosophers as ever, and not the least, though one of the smallest of these philosophers was Tommy Jepps. He made one of a family party, and the Jepps family party was one of I won't guess how many such in the crowd, and in many respects like most of the others. There was Thomas Jepps the elder himself, head of the family by courtesy, but now struggling patiently at its tail, carrying the baby always, and sometimes also carrying Bobby, aged four. There was Mrs. Jepps, warm and short of temper; there were Aunt Susan, rather stout, and Cousin Jane, rather thin; and there was

Cousin Jane's sister's young man's aunt, warmer than 'Tilda Jepps and stouter than Aunt Susan, and perpetually losing something, or losing herself, or getting into original difficulties in the crowd. And then, beside the baby and Bobby, there were Tommy and Polly, whose ages were nine and seven respectively, though it was Polly who tyrannised. It was the way of this small woman to rate her bigger brother in imitation of her mother's manner; Tommy remaining moodily indifferent to the scolding of both, so long as he judged himself beyond the radius of his mother's arm.

'What 'a' you bin an' done with the tickets now?' demanded Mrs. Jepps of her husband, in the midst of the wrestle in the booking-office.

'Me?' asked Jepps, innocently, from behind the baby's frills. 'Me? I—I dunno. Ain't you got 'em?'

'Yes,' piped Tommy, partly visible beneath the capacious lunch-bag of Cousin Jane's sister's young man's aunt, whose shorter name was Mrs. Lunn. 'Yes, mother's got 'em!'

'You look after your little brother an' don't go contradictin' me!' snapped Mrs. Jepps.

'Of course I ain't got 'em,' she went on to Jepps. 'You 've bin an' lost 'em, that 's what you 've done!'

'Don't contradict mother,' Polly echoed, pragmatically, to her wicked brother. 'You be a good boy an' look after Bobby. That 's what you 've got to do. Ain't it, mother?'

'Oh, don't worrit me!' answered the distracted parent. 'Where 's them tickets? Did he give 'em to you, Aunt Susan?'

Aunt Susan hadn't seen them, and passed the question on to Cousin Jane. Cousin Jane, with a reproachful look at the unhappy Jepps, declared that he had never given them to *her*, whatever he might say or fancy; and her sister's young man's aunt gasped and stared and swayed in the crowd, and disclaimed all knowledge of the tickets; also she announced that whatever had become of them she expected to be taken to Southend, and that whatever happened she wasn't going to pay again. Poor Jepps defended himself weakly, but he was generally held to have spoiled the day's pleasure at the beginning. 'I think you 've got 'em, really, 'Tilda,' he protested; 'look in your purse!'

'Yes,' piped Tommy once more, this time from behind Aunt Susan; 'I see mother put 'em in her purse!'

Mrs. Jepps's plunge at Tommy was interrupted by Jepps. 'You might look, at least,' he pleaded.

'Look?' she retorted, tearing open her bag, and snatching the purse from within. 'Look yourself, if you won't believe your own wife!' She spread the purse wide, and displayed—the tickets; all in a bunch, whole tickets and halves mixed together. . . .

'He'd better not let me get hold of him,' said Mrs. Jepps a moment later, nodding fiercely at Tommy. 'Aggravatin' little wretch! He'll drive me mad one o' these days, that's what he'll do!'

With that the family was borne full drive against the barrier, and struggled and tumbled through the gate, mingled with stray members of other parties; all to an accompaniment of sad official confusion in the matter of what ticket belonged to which. But there was no easy rallying in the subway. The crowd pressed on, and presently Mrs. Lunn got into a novel complication by reason of her umbrella,

which she grasped desperately in the middle, somehow drifting away horizontally into the crowd at her full arm's length; so that in a moment she was carried helplessly up the first few steps of the wrong staircase, clinging to her property with might and main, trailing her lunch-bag behind her, and expostulating with much clamour. Jepps, with the baby, watched her impotently; but Tommy, ducking and dodging among the legs of the crowd, got ahead of her, twisted the umbrella into a vertical position, and so releasing it, ducked and dodged back again. Mrs. Lunn was very angry, and the crowd either disregarded her scolding altogether, or laughed at it, so that Tommy, scrambling back triumphantly through the crush, came very handy to divert it.

'If I was yer mother I'd give you a good sound hidin', that's what *I'd* do!' said Cousin Jane's sister's young man's aunt.

Any philosopher might be pardoned some resentment at this. And when his mother, having with difficulty been convinced that the staircase she insisted on was another wrong one, and that the one advised by Tommy was right, forthwith promised him one for himself

when she got him home, he grew wholly embittered, while his sister Polly openly triumphed over him. And so, with a few more struggles and family separations (Mrs. Lunn being lost and recovered twice), the party at length found itself opposite an open third-class carriage door, and climbed in with all the speed it might.

'Ah, well!' said Aunt Susan, 'here we are at last, an' no more bother till we get to Southend any'ow.'

'There'll be a lot if you try to get there in this train, mum,' observed a cynical coster, on whose toes Aunt Susan's weight had left an abiding impression.

'What?' exclaimed Cousin Jane; 'this is the Southend train, ain't it?'

'No, mum,' replied the coster calmly, 'it ain't.'

Mrs. Jepps caught at the door, but it was too late. The train was gathering speed, and in a few seconds it was out of the station. 'There,' said Mrs. Jepps, desperately, 'I knew it was the wrong platform!'

'Then you was wrong again, mum,' pursued the sardonic coster; ''cos it was

the right 'un. But this 'ere 's the wrong train all right.'

'Mother!' squeaked Polly, viciously, 'Tommy says—go away, I *will* tell—Tommy says he knew it was the wrong train when we got in!'

'What! You young——you didn't! How did you know?'

'Read it on the board,' said Tommy, sulkily. 'Board in front of the engine. C, O, L, Col, C, H, E, S, T, chest, E——'

'Take him away, somebody!' yelped Mrs. Jepps. 'Take the little imp out o' my sight or I'll kill him—I know I shall! Knew it was the wrong train, an' let us get in! I——Oh!'

'Why,' pleaded Tommy, in doleful bewilderment, 'when I told you about the tickets you said I was drivin' you mad, an' when I told you about the platform you said you'd whop me when you got me home, an' now 'cos I didn't tell you about the train——'

'He's a saucy young varmint, that's what *he* is,' interrupted Mrs. Lunn, whose misfortunes were telling on her temper and reddening her face. 'Lucky for him he ain't a child o' mine, that's all! I'd show him!'

'So would I!' added Cousin Jane.

'He 's a perfect noosance to bring out,' said Aunt Susan; 'that 's what he is!'

'You 're a naughty, wicked boy, Tommy!' said his superior little sister.

Tommy's spirits sank to the lowest depths of dejection. There was no understanding these grown-up people, and no pleasing them. They were all at him, except his father, and even he seemed sadly grieved, in his mild fashion.

The cynical coster had been chuckling in a quiet, asthmatic way, rather as though some small animal was struggling in his chest. Now he spoke again. 'It 's all right, mum,' he said. 'Don't be rough on the kid. You can change at Shenfield, jest as good as if you come in the right train all the way.'

This was better, and the spirits of the party rose accordingly; though their relief was qualified by a feeling of undignified stultification.

'Givin' us all a fright for nothing,' said Aunt Susan, with an acid glare at the unhappy Tommy; 'it 's a pity some children ain't taught to keep their mouths shut!'

'Why, so I did, an' mother said she 'd——'

'Be quiet now!' interrupted Mrs. Jepps. 'Be quiet! You've done quite enough mischief with your clatter! Catch me bringing you out again on a holiday, that's all!'

'Ah! he should go to Southend, he should, if he was my child!' sighed Mrs. Lunn, bitterly. 'Not much he shouldn't,' she added on consideration, lest the sarcasm were misunderstood.

Ordinarily, Jepps would have received at least half of Tommy's afflictions; but it is low to wig your husband in public. On the other hand children must be corrected on the spot, if only to show how carefully you are bringing them up; and so for the rest of the journey Tommy remained in the nethermost deeps of despondency; never exhibiting the smallest sign of rising to the surface without being instantly shoved under again by a reproof from somebody.

The cynical coster got out at Romford, with another asthmatic chuckle and an undisguised wink at Tommy. The train jogged along through Harold Wood and Brentwood to Shenfield Junction, and there the party found the Southend train at last. With the people

already there they more than filled the compartment they selected, and Tommy had to stand, a distinction which cost him some discomfort; for when he stood by the door he was blamed for interfering with Polly's and Bobby's enjoyment of the landscape, and when he moved up the carriage his efforts to maintain his equilibrium led to complications with Aunt Susan's corns.

'Is the door properly fastened?' asked a lady with a red bonnet and a brilliant squint, of Mrs. Jepps. 'I shouldn't like to see the pore little dears tumble out an' smash theirselves to bits.'

Tommy shook with apprehension, for he had no doubt that, if anything were found wrong with the door, the blame, and plenty of it, would fall on him. But fortunately the fastening was secure; so the lady with the squint went on; 'I 'ope you 'll excuse my mentioning it, but there, I am that frightened with the things you hear, you can't think. There was one little boy, only the other day, now!'

'Did he fall out of a train, mum?' asked Mrs. Jepps.

'No, not exactly, mum, but very much the

same. He was stole—stole by a dark short man with black whiskers an' a scar on his leg,—or else it was the little boy which had the scar on his leg, though I 'm sure it was the man that had the black whiskers, though bein' that took aback at the noos I couldn't swear for certain, though it 's a terrible thing for his mother an' father, whether they was black or ginger.'

'Ah, indeed, that it must be! Tommy! What do I always tell you about lookin' after Bobby in the street? 'Spose *he* was to be took away? It ought to be a lesson to you to mind what you 're told, an' not be such a wicked, disobedient boy!'

'Oh, that ain't the only one, either,' the cross-eyed woman went on, volubly. 'There was quite an intimate friend of a sister o' mine—leastways my sister knew a young woman that had a aunt lodging only a few streets off of her—that lost her little boy too, some munse ago, just the same way, an' ain't ever seen him again.'

'Dear, dear, now! An' took away, just the same?'

'Took away by a dark tall man with a black patch over his eye an' springside boots. Not

to mention a little gal in the very next street to my own next-door neighbour's sister-in-law, as was stole not a fortni't after.'

'Stole by another dark man?' asked the horrified Jepps, his eyes protruding with fatherly emotion.

'Stole by a dark woman with a black shawl an' hat, an' an umbrella with a bone monkey on the 'andle.'

Everybody was deeply impressed, and the singular uniformity in complexion of child-stealers as a class, as well as their sable preference in personal adornment, was accepted as a clause in the scheme of nature. Tommy alone seemed puzzled, as much by these matters as by the wonder how such minute particulars of the vanished malefactors had been obtained. In a less depressed frame of mind he might have put difficult questions. As it was, he prudently held his tongue, and regarded the speaker with sullen astonishment.

But the lady with the squint went on, tireless. She had become acquainted, through devious channels, with so many unparalleled kidnappings, and such a company of swarthy

miscreants passed in guilty array through her conversation, that Southend was reached with the procession in full flourish. Through all this experience Tommy was rigidly restrained from recovering his spirits. By some moral legerdemain each anecdote was made the text for a fresh lecture on his own enormities, before the gathering pile of which he stood confounded: a villain, he grew miserably convinced, as black as any swart kidnapper of them all.

The day was bright, and Southend was crowded everywhere with holiday-makers. Mrs. Jepps rallied her party and adjured Tommy. 'Now you, Tommy, see if you can't begin to be'ave yourself, an' take care o' your little brother an' sister. S'pose a dark man was to come an' take *them* away! Then I s'pose you 'd wish you 'd been a better boy, when it was too late!'

'I 'd make him wish it a quicker way than that!' said Mrs. Lunn spitefully; for her misfortunes rankled still.

As the words left her mouth a horrible squeak rent her ears, and a long pink 'trunk' —one of those paper tubes which, when

blown, extend suddenly to a yard long and as suddenly retreat into a little curl—shot over her shoulder into her eye, and was gone again. With a gasp and a bounce she let go umbrella and lunch-bag together; and, while a grinning boy went dancing and trumpeting away in the crowd, a trickle of fragrant liquor issued from the lunch-bag and wandered across the pavement. Tommy Jepps, startled in the depth of his gloom, hastily stuffed his fist against his mouth, and spluttered irrepressibly over the knuckles. For indeed, in his present state of exasperation, Tommy had little sympathy for the misfortunes of so very distant a relation as Cousin Jane's sister's young man's aunt.

Tommy's father was mildly horrified, and murmured deprecatingly from among the baby's frills. 'Tommy!' he said, in an awe-struck whisper. 'Tommy! Nothing to laugh at!'

'Get out o' my sight!' cried Mrs. Jepps, making a miss at Tommy's head with her own bag. 'Get out o' my sight before I——'

Tommy got out of it with all possible celerity, and took his place in the extreme

rear of the procession which formed as soon as the lunch-bag had been recovered and cleared of broken glass. And so the procession, with a score of others like it, went straggling along the High Street toward the beach, where the crowd was thicker than ever.

There were large open spaces, with shows, and swings, and roundabouts, and stalls, and cocoa-nut shies, and among these the Jepps column wound its way, closing up and stopping here, and tailing out lengthily there. It stopped for a moment before a shooting-gallery, and then lengthened in the direction of a band of niggers; opposite the niggers it closed up once more, and Mrs. Jepps looked about to survey her forces. There was Jepps, perspiring freely under the burden of the baby, for the day was growing hot; there were Aunt Susan, Cousin Jane, and Mrs. Lunn, red and ruffled; there were Polly and Bobby; but—Mrs. Jepps gave a second glance round before she would believe it—there was *not* Tommy!

Mrs. Jepps's chin dropped suddenly, and she began darting and dodging, looking this

way and that among the crowd. 'Tommy!' she cried, 'you Tommy!' with a voice still a little angry, but mainly anxious. 'Mercy on us, where 's the child gone?'

Jepps turned back, with blank alarm on so much of his face as was visible above the baby and its clothes, and the rest of the party started dodging in the manner of Mrs. Jepps. But they dodged to no purpose. Their calls were drowned in the general hubbub, and their questings to and fro were fruitless: Tommy was lost.

'O my child!' cried Mrs. Jepps, 'my lovely, darling boy! What shall I do? He 's lost! He 's been stole! The best child as ever was!'

'Such a little dear!' said Cousin Jane.

'Such a jool of a duck!' said Aunt Susan, affected almost to tears.

'Oh, oh!' gasped Mrs. Jepps, with signs of flopping and fainting; 'an'—an'—you called him a noosance!'

'An' you called him an imp!' retorted Aunt Susan. 'You should ha' treated him better when you had him!'

'If he was a child o' mine,' said Mrs. Lunn

sententiously, 'I'd ha' been a little more patient with him!'

'Patient?' cried Mrs. Jepps, stung past all peril of fainting. 'Why, mum, you had the face to call him a saucy young varmint, before my very eyes, mum! Before you smashed your gin-bottle, mum!'

But with that Jepps intervened for peace. 'Don't let's have no words, 'Tilda,' he said, meekly agitated. 'You all pitched into him, more or less, o' course, but the question now is——'

'Pitched into him!' ejaculated Mrs. Jepps, turning on her husband. 'Well, an' if we did it was your fault, I s'pose! First you put me out about the tickets, an' then you took us into a train that the dear child hisself could see was wrong, an' now—an' now of course you try to put it all on me! It's you as ought to ha' been pitched into, not him, the love! It's 'ateful to hear you talk, Thomas Jepps!'

'Shameful!' said Cousin Jane.

'Shockin'!' said Aunt Susan.

'Unmanly an' disgraceful!' said Cousin Jane's sister's young man's aunt.

Jepps blinked and quailed. 'But—but'—

he spluttered feebly—' I—I—I on'y—don't let 's have no words! Try an' find him; an'——'

'Oh yes!' sobbed Mrs. Jepps, now verging on tears. 'That 's the off-hand way he treats me! After aggravatin' me to death all the morning, an' then going an' losing my own darling child—letting him get stole—he tells *me* to go an' find him! Oh dear! Just like a man!'

'So it is!' assented Cousin Jane. 'Always contrairy!'

''Orrid!' said Aunt Susan.

But poor Jepps was off to the nearest stall to ask the stall-keeper if he had seen a boy. It seemed that the stall-keeper had seen a good many boys that morning. But had he seen Jepps's own boy? This conundrum the stall-keeper gave up without hesitation. But Jepps persevered. Had the stall-keeper seen any dark party with a boy—the sort of dark party as might have stole him? To which the stall-keeper made luminous reply that the darkest parties he had seen that morning were the nigger minstrels a little way off; and that was all he knew about it.

Jepps's example did something, and presently

the whole party scattered for the hunt. Jepps was left with the baby in his arms, and the other two children about his knees, and he had strict orders not to lose any of them, nor to wander from a certain indicated point, near which the rest of the party might find him on occasion. He was not allowed to join in the search, because somebody must take care of the children, and Mrs. Jepps felt that she would die of suspense if she were condemned to wait inactive.

Mrs. Jepps was anything but inactive, and the other ladies were as busy as Mrs. Jepps. Before they separated they seized on a wandering apple-woman, who was confused and badgered into a cloudy admission that she *had* seen a boy with a dark man somewhere, a little while ago, or perhaps rather before that; and, her replies being considered evasive, she was instantly suspected of complicity. Indeed, a very short discussion of her information enabled the ladies to convince each other that it amounted to an unmistakable confession, and made it plain that the plan to be followed was to hunt dark men, with small boys or without them.

The plan was put in action with too much vigour to last. The ladies made out in divers directions among the fifty or sixty thousand people about them, and discovered several dark men. In the upshot the scheme of the hunt was modified on the urgent suggestion of the inspector in charge at the police-station, in the presence of a sunburnt and plaintful donkey - man, an elderly mulatto, three clamorous organ-grinders, and the most astonished young Japanese student who ever went forth from his lodgings to study the holiday customs of Europe.

So, with other passages of adventure, it came to pass that Aunt Susan, having rejoined Mrs. Jepps, the two, fatigued and a trifle hysterical, returned to where they had left Jepps. As they turned the last corner, a red-headed man, with his hat in his hand, came running past them, and vanished in the crowd; while they almost immediately perceived Jepps in the near distance, striving his utmost to raise a gallop, while Polly and Bobby hung to his coat-tails, and the baby tumbled and struggled in his arms.

'Stop him!' cried Jepps, choking with the

breathlessness of his trot and the flapping of the baby's cape over his mouth. 'Stop him! It's him! He's stole my——'

'The villain!' cried Mrs. Jepps, turning and charging the crowd. 'Stop him! He's stole my child!'

'Stop him!' gasped Jepps again. 'He snatched my——'

But Mrs. Jepps and Aunt Susan were deep in the crowd, chasing and grabbing, this time, at red-headed men. Red-headed men, however, were scarce in that particular corner just at the moment, and the scarcest of all was the red-headed man they wanted.

Jepps, gasping still, came up with his wife and Aunt Susan in the midst of a knot of people, answering the inquiries of curious sympathisers as he came along.

'Was it a good 'un?' asked another family man, with another baby in his arms, just as Jepps reached his wife.

'Yes,' answered Jepps, 'a real good 'un!'

'The best in the world!' sobbed Mrs. Jepps.

'I won it in a raffle,' Jepps added.

'*What?*' cried Aunt Susan. 'A raffle?

What do you mean? Is this a time for sich jokes, Thomas?'

'Jokes?' bleated poor Jepps. 'It ain't no joke! He stole my watch, I tell you! Snatched it while I was a-trying to keep baby quiet!'

'Your watch!' Mrs. Jepps exclaimed; 'your watch! Thomas Jepps, you ain't fit to be trusted neither with a watch nor a child, you ain't!'

## II

Tommy Jepps, meanwhile, accepted his misfortune with far greater equanimity than did his bereaved family.

He had lagged behind a little at the rifle-gallery, a place where you shot into a sort of tunnel with a target at the other end. The tunnels—there were four of them—interested him deeply, and he walked round to the side of the establishment to see how they were built. They were long, tapering, metal tubes, it seemed, painted red. Tommy walked along to the very end, hoping to see something of the target mechanism, but that

was boxed in. Here, at some little distance from where his wanderings started, his attention was arrested by a man in an incipient crowd, who offered to eat a lighted newspaper for the small subscription of two shillings. It seemed to Tommy that so handsome an offer must be closed with at once, so he pushed into the group, and stared.

And that was how Tommy Jepps was lost. For each individual member of the crowd agreed with Tommy, feeling convinced that the others would be sure to subscribe so reasonable a sum without delay, and waiting so patiently that the subscription was a long time beginning. And when at last it did begin it grew so slowly that at last the champion fire-swallower of all the countries he could remember was fain to be content with eighteenpence, at which very moderate sum his contract was completed. Having witnessed this feat, Tommy's eyes retired to their normal places in his head, and his mouth, which had been wider open than the fire-swallower's, slowly closed. The crowd opened out, and Tommy, who had been effectually buried in it for half an hour, awoke to the

revelation that the rest of his party was nowhere to be seen.

For a moment it seemed a rather serious thing. Then, with a pause of reflection, he saw his misfortune in another light. He peered cautiously about him, and, after a little more consideration, he resolved that he would not be found—just yet, at any rate.

Tommy was not only a philosopher, but a boy of business. He had come out for a day's pleasure, but he must attend to business first; as a philosopher and a strategist he must secure his line of retreat. So he started off back to the railway station, keeping a wary eye for his relations as he went.

The station was just a little less crowded now, though it was busy enough still. Tommy had not settled how, exactly, he should set about his business, but he kept his eyes open and looked out for a friend. Grown-up people, his experience taught him, were difficult to diplomatise; you never could tell for certain what they would do or say next, and it was apt to be something unpleasant when it came. But there was a sort of grown-up persons—Tommy could never have described the sort,

neither could he ever mistake it—who were quite excellent, and always behaved like bricks to boys. And they were not such a rare sort of people either. So he set up a watch for some person of this kind, resolved to ask help and advice. He had not long to wait for one who, his instinct told him, was a capital specimen—a stout, red-faced man in a roaring tweed suit, with a big gold watch-chain. Several other stout men were with him, and they were all laughing and chuckling together at a joke one of them had made half an hour before.

'Please sir!' said Tommy, craning his neck up at the red-faced man.

'Eh! Hullo!' said the man, almost falling over him. 'Well, young 'un, what's up?'

'Please sir, will they give me another ticket home, and who ought I to go and ask for it?'

'Another ticket home? What for? Lost your own?'

'No, sir—mother's got it. But I've lost mother.'

'O-o-o-oh! Lost your mother, eh? Well, would you know your way home if you had the ticket?'

'Yes, sir. But'—this with a sudden apprehension—'but I don't want to go home yet!'

'No? Why not?'

'I come out to have a holiday, sir!'

The red face broadened into a wide grin, and some of the stout men laughed outright. 'So you're goin' off on the spree all by yourself, are you?' said the red-faced man. 'That's pluck. But if you go asking for another ticket they'll keep you in the office till your mother comes for you, or take you to the police-station. *That* wouldn't be much of a holiday, would it?'

Tommy was plainly dismayed at the idea, and at his doleful change of face several stout men laughed aloud. 'Come, Perkins,' said one, 'it's only one an' a penny, half single. I'll toss you who pays!'

'Done!' replied the red-faced man, 'sudden death—you call'; and he spun a shilling.

'Heads!' called the challenger.

'Tails it is,' was the answer. 'You pay. What station, young 'un?'

'Stratford, sir.'

'That's all right,' said the loser, moving off

with his hand in his pocket. 'I was a bit rash. It might ha' been Manchester!'

'That's saved me precisely one d.,' observed the red-faced man, spinning his shilling again and dexterously transferring it to Tommy's startled palm. 'You go and buy the town, you desperate young rip! And take care you don't go losing the last train!'

Tommy was almost more amazed than delighted. This was magnificent—noble. As soon as he could, he began to think. It was plain that being lost had its advantages—very decided advantages. Those stout men wouldn't have looked at him a second time in ordinary circumstances, but, because he was lost—behold the shilling and the railway ticket! Here was a discovery: nothing less than a new principle in holiday-making for boys. Get lost, and make your holiday self-supporting.

He did not buy the town, but began modestly with a penn'orth of bull's-eyes, to stimulate thought. He sucked them and thought his hardest: thought so hard, indeed, that in his absence of mind he swallowed a bull's-eye prematurely, and stood staring, with

a pain as of a red-hot brick passing slowly through his chest, and an agonised effort to remember if he had heard of people dying through swallowing bull's-eyes whole. The pain in the chest presently passed off, however, and he found himself staring at a woman with a basket of apples and oranges.

'Apples, three a penny,' said the woman enticingly. 'Oranges a ha'penny each. There's nice ripe 'uns, my dear!'

'I've lost my mother,' replied Tommy irrelevantly.

'Lost yer mother!' responded the woman, with much sympathy. 'Why, I wonder if you're the little boy as I was asked about? Has yer father got pale whiskers an' a round 'at, an' a baby, an' yer mother an' three other ladies, an' yer little brother an' sister?'

Tommy nodded—perhaps rather guiltily.

The woman swung her basket on her arm and gave him an energetic push on the shoulder. 'You go straight along down there, my dear,' she said, pointing, 'an' then round to the left, an' yer father 's waiting by the second turning. Don't forget! Here—have an apple!' and she thrust one into his hand.

'And an orange,' she added impulsively, stuffing one into his jacket pocket.

This was really very satisfactory. He had half expected the apple, but the orange was quite an extra—had in fact been wrung from the honest apple-woman by the pathetic look occasioned by the swallowing of the bull's-eye. Tommy went off in the direction she indicated, but took the wrong way at the first turning, being much occupied with thought. For he was resolving to look all day as pathetic as could be expected of a boy with a holiday all to himself, and a new invention to make it pay.

In truth the invention paid very well. Tommy perambulated the crowded beach on a system of scouting devised for the occasion. He made a halt at each convenient booth or stand, and from behind it carefully reconnoitred the crowd in front. No doubt he was searching anxiously for his sorrowing relations.

Meantime, as I have said, the invention worked excellently. He did not always set it in motion by the crude statement that he had lost his mother; he varied his gambit, so to speak. Sometimes he asked people if they

had seen her. In this way he procured a short sea voyage by interesting the mother of an embarking family which did not quite fill the boat. He had his railway ticket, he explained, and could get home, but meantime he must make his holiday as best he might. That excellent family yielded a penny and a bun as well as the experience in navigation. Just such another family was good for a turn on a roundabout.

'Got no change,' said the roundabout man, as roundabout men do. For it is their custom, if possible, to postpone giving change in the hope of their patrons emerging from the machine too sick and giddy to remember it. 'Got no change. I'll give it you when you come off.'

'Not you,' retorted the father of the family, made cunning by experience. 'You'll be too busy, or forget, or something. Here's a boy what's looking for his mother; we'll make up the bob with him.'

So the morning went; and Tommy, in act of acquiring a high opinion of the generosity of his fellow-creatures, attained a higher one of his own diplomacy. Not that it invariably

succeeded. At times, indeed, its failure was total. There was a cocoa-nut shy proprietor, for instance, whose conduct led Tommy to consider him a very worthless person. He began by most cordially inviting Tommy to try his luck—called him a young sportsman, in fact. Tommy was much gratified, and selected a stick.

'Money first!' said the man, extending a dirty palm.

'Lost my mother,' replied Tommy, confidently, having come to regard this form of words as the equivalent of coin of the realm.

'*What?*' The man's face expressed furious amazement.

'Lost my mother!' Tommy repeated a little louder, surprised to find anybody so dull of comprehension.

''Ere, get out!' roared the outraged tradesman, who was not educated to the point of regarding a cocoa-nut shy a necessity of life for a lost boy. 'Get out!' And he snatched the stick with such energy that Tommy got out with no delay.

He was so far cast down by this ruffian's

deplorable ignorance of the rules of the game that his next transaction was for cash. He saw a man selling paper 'trunks' of the sort that had so seriously startled Mrs. Lunn earlier in the morning, and he greatly desired one for himself. But the trunk merchant was an unpromising-looking person — looked, in fact, rather like the cocoa-nut man's brother. So Tommy paid his penny, and set out to amuse himself.

The toy was quite delightful for a while, and confounded and dismayed many respectable persons. But after a little time it began to pall; partly, perhaps, because it interfered with business. It is not diplomatic for any boy wishing to appeal to the pity of a lady or gentleman in the character of a lost child, to begin by blowing a squeaking paper 'trunk' into that lady or gentleman's face. It strikes the wrong note, so to speak. So presently Tommy tired of the 'trunk,' and devised a new use for it.

He looked about to find some suitable person to whom to offer the article for sale, and at length he fixed on a comfortable old lady and gentleman who were sitting on a

newspaper spread on the sand, and eating sandwiches. Now to the superficial it might seem that a stout and decorous old couple of about sixty-five years of age and thirty-two stone total weight, were not precisely the most likely customers on Southend beach for such an implement as Tommy had to offer. But Tommy was less superficial than you might think.

'Please would you like to buy that?' he asked, looking as interesting and as timid as he could manage. 'Only a ha'penny. It cost a penny.'

'Why, bless the child!' cried the old lady; 'we don't want a thing like that!' And the old gentleman sat speechless, with his mouth full of sandwich.

'I 've lost my mother,' said Tommy.

For a moment more the old couple continued to stare, and then the old lady realised the pathos of the situation in a flash. Tommy suddenly found himself snatched into a sitting position beside her and kissed. And the next moment he was being fed with sandwiches.

'Poor little chap!' said the nice old lady. 'Poor little chap! Lost his mother and tried

to sell his toy to buy something to eat! Have another sandwich, my dear.'

Tommy did not in the least need the sandwiches, having been eating almost all day, and being even now lumpy because of pockets distended by an apple, a paper of bull's eyes, several biscuits, and a large piece of toffee. But he wished to be polite, so he ate as much as he could, and answered the old lady's questions to the best of his ability. He told her his name, his age, where he lived, and what sums he could do. He assured her that he knew his way home, and had his ticket safe; and he eased her mind wonderfully by his confidence that he could find his mother very soon, and particularly because of his absolute certainty of meeting her, at latest, at the railway station. And finally, not without difficulty, he tore himself away, bearing with him not only the rejected 'trunk,' but added wealth to the amount of fourpence.

He did very well with the trunk—very well indeed. He never got quite so much as fourpence again, but he got some pennies, one twopence, and several halfpennies. He continued to select his customers with care, and

rarely made a mistake. Some selections were unfortunate and unproductive, however, but that he quite expected; and it surprised him to find what a number of benevolent persons, made liberal by a fine Bank Holiday, were ready to pay for a thing and then let him keep it. He never fell into the error of offering his stock-in-trade to anybody in the least likely to compromise his dignity by using it, for persons of sufficient age and dignity were easily to be found by a boy of discrimination, even on Southend beach.

But everything must come to an end at last, and so did the commercial career of the trunk. Having carefully observed a large, good-tempered-looking woman sitting under an umbrella, and having convinced himself that she was not likely to need a paper trunk for personal entertainment, he proceeded to business in the usual manner.

'Lost yer mother?' said the woman affably. 'All right, you'll soon find her. Here's yer ha'penny.'

And with that this unscrupulous female actually *took* the trunk and handed it over to some children who were playing hard by.

Tommy felt deeply injured. He had no idea those children were hers. It was shameful, he thought, to take advantage of a lost boy in such a prompt fashion as that. And he had begun to feel quite a reviving affection for that trunk.

But it had paid excellently, on the whole, and, at any rate, with his accumulated capital, he could make a pleasant holiday for the rest of the day: to say nothing of what might yet accrue from his distressful situation.

So business danced with pleasure through the sunny hours till Tommy was driven to absolute flight by an excellent but over-zealous old gentleman who desired to take him to the police-station. It was a narrow squeak: and it was a most fortunate circumstance that the zealous old gentleman was wholly unable to run. As it was the adventure decided Tommy to abandon business, and seek some secluded spot suitable to the pursuit of pleasure, unaccompanied and undisturbed.

The cliffs at Southend, as you may know, are laid out as public gardens, traversed by precipitous paths, embushed with shrubs, and dotted with convenient seats. But Tommy

did not want a seat. In simple fact he was a little tired of keeping a constant look-out, and since there were his own party, the apple-woman, whom he had espied in the distance twice since their first encounter, and the zealous old gentleman, all at large somewhere in Southend, he judged it safer to lie under a convenient bush, in some place commanding an interesting view, and there begin a leisurely picnic.

He found a capital bush, just behind one of the seats; a thick bush that no eye could penetrate from the outside, yet from between the twigs of which he had an excellent view of the sea and some part of the gardens. It was almost as good as a pirate's cave, and so very proper to Tommy's situation.

He fell to taking imaginary shots at all comers, with slight intervals for toffee, till the ramparts of his stronghold were piled with invisible copses. Men of all complexions fell to his unerring aim, till at last there came a red-headed man, walking up the path with a very laboured air of casual indifference, although he puffed visibly as he came, as if he had been running; also, as he walked, he

glanced anxiously over his shoulder. Tommy pulled the trigger of fancy and one more desperate foeman bit the dust; after which he sat on the seat before the stronghold, so that his legs obstructed Tommy's view.

For a moment Tommy was in doubt how to deal with so inconvenient an enemy as this, and then he forgot his desperate defence altogether; for he was amazed to see the man's hand come stealing out behind him into the bush, and there deposit on the ground, absolutely on Tommy's gun-rest—two watches!

The hand was withdrawn as stealthily as it came, and the man began, with some difficulty, to whistle a tune. And now up the same path there came another man: a tall, well-set-up man, who walked like a policeman; which, indeed, was exactly what he was—a policeman in plain clothes.

'Well, Higgs,' said the newcomer suspiciously, 'what's your game to-day?'

'Game?' whined the red-headed man in an injured tone. 'Why, no game at all, guv'nor, not to-day. Can't a bloke come out for a 'oliday?'

'Oh, of course,' replied the other; 'anybody can come out for a holiday. But there 's some as does rum things on their holidays. I 've got my eye on you, my fine feller!'

'S'elp me, guv'nor, it 's all right!' protested the red-headed man, rising and moving off a little way. 'I 'm on'y 'avin' a 'oliday, guv'nor! You can turn me over if you like!'

Now Tommy did not know that to turn a man over meant to search him, but he did not stop to wonder. For what occupied the whole of his attention now, even to the neglect of the very toffee in his mouth, was the astounding fact that one of the watches was his own father's!

There was no mistake about it. There were initials on the silver case—not his father's initials, but those of a previous owner—and Tommy knew the letters well enough. Here was news of his father since the morning; his watch had been stolen!

In fact, three links of a broken chain were still hanging to the bow; and Tommy knew the chain as well as he knew the watch.

Tommy had already approved himself a boy of business, a philosopher, and a practical

person. He knew nothing of the second watch, whether it was the red-headed man's or another's; nor did he understand a word of the conversation he had overheard. But he did know that this watch with the broken chain was his father's. So, with no more ado, he put it in his trousers pocket, on top of the bag of bull's-eyes, and then quietly withdrew from the bush; leaving the red-headed man and his enemy talking some yards away on the opposite side.

. . . . .

'I can't go home without him!' cried Mrs. Jepps that evening in the booking-office of Southend station. 'My darling child! I can't! I can't!'

'But come an' ask the station-master,' reasoned her husband. 'He might ha' come here to see about gettin' home. We never thought o' that!'

A small boy, who had been ineffectually trying to weigh himself by clinging fiercely to the arm of the machine used for luggage, let go as he recognised the voices, and came out of the dim corner, calm of demeanour and very bunchy about the pockets.

'Hullo, mother!' said Tommy. 'I 've been waiting for you a long time!'

Mrs. Jepps really did faint at last. But it was not for long. When she came to herself, with water from the waiting-room water-bottle in her hair and down her back, she recovered her customary energy with surprising rapidity. 'Tommy, you wicked, ungrateful little wretch!' she said, 'a nice holiday you 've made o' this for me! Wait till I get you home, that 's all!'

'Why, Tommy,' said his father. 'Wasn't there no dark party after all?'

'I don't believe dark parties steal boys at all,' said Tommy. 'But ginger parties steal watches! Come!' he added, with a new importance in his small voice, and a rattle of the money in his trousers pockets. 'Got your tickets? Keep close to me, an' I 'll show you the right train.'

*OLD ESSEX*

# THE LEGEND OF LAPWATER HALL

DOWN the Thames, beyond Hole Haven, there is a part of Essex now painful to see for any man who knew it thirty, twenty—even fifteen years ago. For there, late in the nineteenth century, he saw the gay and simple Essex of the eighteenth; and now it has been vastly improved. Little villas of cheap pretension offend the light of day, and a scum of broken brick has choked the green fields, till now they lie dead and dirty, and scarified with schemed roadways.

But in the days when this was old Essex still, when the people knew the tales and the songs belonging to those parts and were not ashamed of them,—it was then that they told the story of Lapwater Hall.

The house stood a mile or more from Leigh village. You climbed Church Hill, rising, as it were, through the higher tiers of Leigh's

tiled roofs, you passed the church and the rectory wall under the noisy rooks, and you stood on the brow with the village below you and all the sunny sea beyond it. Hence the way was clear. With back to the sea you crossed a little furzy waste, and went, by stile and path, across three beanfields. As a fact, of course, the fields grew their crops in due rotation, but I like to remember them as beanfields fragrant with blossom, where dozy butterflies tumbled, and where the path rose and dipped, taking you down among the flowers sometimes, and sometimes lifting you to see the world and the shining sea.

The third field ended in a gate, and through the bars you saw the white London road. Here you might have pitched a stone against the wall of Lapwater Hall, but for the clump of trees on your left which hid the house and the pond beside it. Leigh House, I believe, was its older and proper name, but among all natives—those honest souls, each half-farmer and half-fisherman, and now wholly vanished—it was Lapwater Hall and nothing else. It was not a very large house—Essex people in old days being given to call any house a hall that

was much bigger than a cottage—but it was well faced and neat in its proportions, and as good a house of its size as any thereabout, with a ghost of its own. The story you heard by parts from gossips who had learned it from their grandmothers; and put together it went thus:—

At the beginning of the year 1751 Leigh House was falling to pieces. Old, neglected, and untenanted for years, it was scarce worth touching except to pull down, and there were thrifty souls who had taken to reckoning when it might become a conscionable act to carry the timber. But early in that same year, when Essex roads lay in ruts and mud, they found they had debated too long. For there came news, stirring news in that time and place. For the first part, Leigh House and farm was sold; next, and more stirring, a stranger had bought it; last, and most surprising, he had come on a brown mare, and the mare had no ears.

Whence the stranger came not a soul could tell. He had been seen riding through Hadleigh, splashed to the wig with mud, and a little afterward he stopped at Leigh House,

being observed by one Amos Tricker, who was hedging close by the road. In those times a man might have sat by Leigh House a twelvemonth without seeing a 'foreigner' ride by—any absolute stranger being classed a 'foreigner.' For this reason Amos Tricker dropped his sickle and stared hard at the man and his mare. Of the two the mare was the handsomer, spite of her uncanny defect. The man seemed of middle height, but of shape as massive and ugly as a bulldog, with a coarse face and a squint; but his animal was fine and brown, hard and handsome, standing well on good legs. The spectacle of a stranger was warrant enough for a mighty stare, but that of an earless mare—an unearthly, snaky-headed thing as it was—was stupefying. Amos was stupefied.

'What's this place?' asked the stranger.

A stranger was surprising, and an earless mare was worse; but an earless mare carrying a man who didn't know Leigh House, in sight of which Amos had spent his life, was paralysing. Amos was paralysed.

'What the devil are you staring at? Damme, is this Leigh House?'

Amos nodded feebly. With that the stranger put the brown mare easily over the falling paling, and walked her round the rotten walls of the house. That done he turned and trotted off Eastwood way without another word. Amos stared and stared still, till the apparition was a mile out of sight; then he brought his eyes slowly back to the hedge, picked up his sickle and looked at that; and having by this means collected and concentrated his faculties, he dropped the sickle once more and trudged off. For such an occasion as this there was nothing but confabulation and a mug of beer.

Now the stranger had been seen at Hadleigh village, as I have said, before he came upon Amos Tricker. And the Hadleigh folk, having watched him all through the street and debated him for the rest of the day, stood in a fair way to produce between them a far more imaginatively embellished picture of the phenomenon than the single slow brain of Amos Tricker could possibly conceive. And yet, in all their diverse and varying tales of his broad frame, his long arms, his squint, his pistols, his brown mare, and his manner of asking the distance of Leigh House, there was not a word of the

mare's lack of ears; and when Amos Tricker spoke of it he was overwhelmed by numbers. The smith, a very old and bow-legged man, who sat permanently at his door while his son worked in the smithy, appealed to the judgment of Hadleigh as to the likelihood of a mare with no ears passing his experienced eyes and leaving him unaware of the deficiency; and the company supported him with a unanimous vote of ears to the brown mare. Amos, nevertheless, stood valiantly and immovably to his own observation, goading the more downright of his adversaries to something approaching an affirmation that the brown mare had rather more ears than usual.

Soon news came to Leigh and thereabout, travelling from Rochford by way of Eastwood. Mr. Gilbert Craddock had bought Leigh House and farm, and the house was to be rebuilt, and that in haste; and in truth with scarce a decent fortnight wherein the news might be considered, there descended on Leigh House Mr. Gilbert Craddock himself, with the attorney from Rochford and a master-builder, Whereupon Amos Tricker triumphed in the face of all Hadleigh, for Mr. Gilbert Craddock

was the stranger of the debate, and the brown mare he rode had manifestly no ears.

Then came a great measuring in and staking out, knocking down and digging up, and in due time, or rather before it, the plan of the new house was displayed to the eyes of the curious in lines of red brick, which presently grew into ledges and then into walls. By times Mr. Craddock would come and inspect the work, grumbling unceasingly with many oaths. In everything he found delay and a trick to cheat a too easy gentleman; and he said it in language beyond anything the bricklayers had ever endured from a foreman. They held it uncommon strong, even for a gentleman.

All this time Leigh learned little of Mr. Gil Craddock beyond his name, and Leigh gossip fed on speculation. The brown mare with no ears brought its rider at irregular periods, and the bricklayers were ever in danger of a chance visitation. Where Mr. Craddock went in the intervals was a mystery; even the attorney had no notion, or said he had none. When Mr. Craddock stayed at Leigh it was at the Smack Inn, where he would stable his mare and walk across the fields to his new house;

and when he walked it could be seen that he was bow-legged from much riding. He would never talk; surly reserve and a violent exaction of respect were his personal habits; guess and invention were all the gossips could use. It was largely believed that he was a secret Government official, coming into these quiet parts to serve some ruthless design of the gaugers, the natural foes of half Leigh. It was ascertained, indeed, that the brown mare's name was Meg; but why had she no ears? The best guess Leigh could make was that it was some part of a horse taming charm—something beyond the lunane and honey-cake that nobody doubted had been already used. For the brown mare was fond of her master, which seemed an unreasonable thing except by effect of cunning interference.

Now the journeymen who laid brick and rafter at Leigh House were stout Essex men who loved every pot for the ale it would hold; and as was the way in that county, it was provided in their hiring that every man should have his two pots a day as part wage. Wherefore Amos Tricker, cutting hedges no more, travelled back and forth all day with a

great wheelbarrow-load of pots, taking solid pay at both ends, and some liquid discount on the way: since no man could ask another to bring a barrow-load of full pots across three lumpy fields without a spill.

But although each man's lawful due was no more than two pots a day, every man looked for more on occasion. For past memory of any journeyman in Essex a visit on the work from the owner, the master's own master, bought an extra pot for each man, or more, according to the gentleman's gentlemanly qualities. But a pot at least was something near a matter of right; and since Essex ale is the best of drink, it was common enough that the gentleman took his own pot with the rest, and for the short moments of that pot gentle and simple were good neighbours together. So that when Mr. Gil Craddock first came, and, having sworn his hour or two, rode away leaving neither pot nor penny piece behind him, he was thought to err from forgetfulness and nothing worse; for the men had had their two pots, and it is the property of Essex ale to make men very charitable. Furthermore, it was judged as against

nature that any gentleman so free with his curses should be sparing with his liquor. But Mr. Gil Craddock came and went and came and went again, and it was plain that he was either illiberal or mighty slow of apprehension; for which latter failing the men took good care to give him no excuse in the world.

So it went, thirstily enough, till the walls were of full height and the last roof-beam was fixed. At that time, and now, and at all times since houses first were made, not in Essex only, but in all places where houses stand, the fixing of the last roof-beam was, is, and has been an occasion of much rejoicing; and by all precedent and law of the craft now, at any rate, ale was due, and plenty, and time in which to treat it as ale deserves. A gentleman might even spread a meal, but that was a matter of grace, and not to be claimed, like the drink, in the name of ancient custom that was almost law.

It chanced that as this same last beam was being set in its place, Mr. Craddock looked on from below, and when at last it rested fair the men gave a cheer together, left their places, and gathered about him. But he

neither understood their behaviour nor felt delight in the occasion ; he opened his mouth, and was three oaths on the way to ordering them back to their work, when he was met by a frank demand for extra beer.

Mr. Craddock's squint intensified, and his face swelled in red lumps. His common flow of language failed him in his extremity, and what words he found came in broken bursts.

'Beer? . . . Beer? Ye boozy scabs! . . . Ha'n't ye enough a'ready, and more? . . . Beer? . . . Don't I pay for it, and for every minute o' time you rob me of—Swabs! . . . Swillpot dogs! Hounds! Lapping all day! . . . Lap in the pond, ye dogs! Go to the pond! . . . Lap water, saucy hounds; if more drink ye must have, lap water, as better dogs do every day! Lap water!'

And with that his faculty of speech returned in full, and the men shrank under a hurricane of oaths that sent Amos Tricker's daughter Nan, who was bringing a message, out of earshot aghast. Then Mr. Gil Craddock, with a furious promise to the master-builder that he would teach him, and his men too, the respect due to a gentleman, and break

the head of the next man he caught loitering or breathing the name of beer, swung up in his saddle and was gone.

It was more than defeat for those illustrious drinkers, the bricklayers and the carpenters. Here was immemorial precedent, vested interest, privilege of the craft, set at naught, kicked aside, broken down at a blow. And for themselves, insult was heaped on injury by the reference of dry human throats to a pond; insult the sharper because in fact there was little better resort for them, since in anticipation of the proper honour to the last beam every man had already disposed of his two pots. The genius who invented strikes was yet to be born; wherefore there was nothing for it but to get back to work with ill-will and grumbling. And since insult sticks in a man's mind longer than injury it was the ignoble suggestion of the pond that was grumbled over longest.

They grumbled and sulked and grumbled over again. They saw no remedy, though they longed to turn Mr. Gil Craddock's words upon himself; till in course of days and grumbles it occurred to some lesser genius,

not tall enough to invent a strike, to dub the new house Lapwater Hall.

The word went about the place among the new walls and rafters with grins and chuckles.

'He-he! Ha-ha! Lapwater Hall!'

'Mighty fond o' carlin' names he be, too! Fair 's fair, an' 'tis none but fair other folk take a turn a-carlin' names too!'

'Ha, ha! Hey? Lapwater Hall!'

'Tells folk to lap water, do he? So 'tis Lapwater Hall! 'Tis a merry word! He-he!'

'Hey! A true usable name ta be. Lapwater Hall! And so folk 'll know what to expect!'

''Tis good jocoshious, that! Lapwater Hall!'

At night the new name went to every ale-house within five miles, and the next day it radiated from these; and soon it was generally current, so that by the time the wainscoting was well in hand scarce a soul thought of calling the new house anything else. This was partly, in truth, for a reason of convenience. For during the years of desola-

tion at Leigh House another house of that name had arisen in the village at the hill-top by the church. The first and true name of this was the Black House; but clearly Leigh House was the handsomer name, and since it was fallen out of use with the older place itself, it was picked up and put in service. So that in the confusion between the old Leigh House that was the new house, and the new Leigh House that was now the older of the two, some name of effective distinction was needed, and Lapwater Hall did admirably.

Lapwater Hall it was then, and the name grew into daily, commonplace use wholly unknown to Mr. Craddock. For as the works neared their end his affairs kept him much away, and his visits grew fewer and shorter, to nobody's sorrow. But when the last streak of paint had been laid a fortnight and the builder's men were drinking their ale on a pleasanter job a good way off, Mr. Craddock arrived to take up his residence.

He stamped about the house in his common mood, but Nan Tricker had so well swept and tidied, under the eye of old Mrs. Fidler, who

was to keep house, that he could find no fault for a long while, and so continued to stamp about till he came on Nan herself a-lovering over the fence with Tim Ladds of Belfairs. This gave him the opportunity to drive them both about their business, after which he took his rest.

It was on the next day that Mr. Gil Craddock began to grow aware of his unpopularity. The stables were ready, and he went forth, riding-whip in hand, to fetch the brown mare over from the Smack, taking a little turn about the farm on the way.

Two men were walking down Lost Lane. 'They're into Lapwater Hall, 'twould seem,' said one.

Mr. Craddock looked round quickly. The words had not reached his ear clearly, but he went to the hedge and stared very hard after the men.

He inspected his fields with much complacency. Here he swaggered, a country gentleman, with good house and land of his own, and everything handsome about him. Who the devil had stacked that rick? That person should hear about it, and soon.

At the first gate on the way to Leigh he met a small boy with a basket. The boy had no hat, but he tugged a rag of hair very respectfully as he held back the gate.

'What's that, boy?' demanded Mr. Craddock, pointing at the basket with his whip.

'Treacle and candles, sir, for Lapwater Hall.'

Mr. Gil Craddock squinted fiercely at the boy for twelve seconds, and made him repeat the words. Whereat he clouted the boy on the head, and stalked on.

In Leigh his reception was not of a piece. Some pulled off hats, others stared over fences. He strode into the Smack, and the company, half a dozen fishermen, stopped their talk on the instant; some rose, and some sat stolidly in their places. Among them that sat was Big Sam Gill, a smuggling, hard-drinking ruffian, eminent among the ruffians—no scarcities—of Leigh; who cared for nobody, and would much rather fight the first man he saw than not. Big Sam Gill resumed the conversation with a raised voice and offensive emphasis.

'Gen'elman! He ben't no man, let alone gen'elman! Ta ben't no man as tells another

to drink out o' t' hoss-pond. 'Tis a swine. An' so they carls it Lapwater Hall! Ha! ha!' Big Sam guffawed in Mr. Gil Craddock's face.

At the beginning of the speech that gentleman's ill-sorted eyes had turned ferociously on the group. At its end, with one stride and a reach, he clutched the big red ear that was on the near side of Sam Gill's shaggy head, and drove the head a great thump against the wall.

Sam was up in a flash, and hurled himself at his aggressor, but was met with a straight smash of the left, flush in the face, like the kick of a horse. Then, even while he stood and blinked, the butt of Mr. Gil Craddock's riding-whip beat across his head a dozen blows; till Big Sam Gill lay heaped on the floor with broken head enough for three. Mr. Craddock was a prompt man, whatever else might be said about him. He snarled across the faces of Big Sam's friends, gave them a curse between them, with a thump of his whip on the table that made the pots jump, and stamped out.

It was a brisk mile to the house for the brown mare, for she carried an ill-tempered

man. In the road before the house Mr. Craddock saw a wagon, laden with many pots and pans and a deal of crockery; and as he turned for the stable-yard, Nan Tricker, bringing a mug of ale, met him full in the way, and began explanations forthwith.

''Twere onny for Tim, sir—Tim o' Belfairs. Wagoner were carryin' the crocks to Black House as guessin' 'twere the Leigh House meant, but Tim bringed him on, knowin' 'twere Lapwater——' Nan checked the word too late.

'Go on, damme! Go on! Lapwater Hall! Lapwater Hall ye 'll call my house, will ye, ye drabs?' Mr. Craddock snatched the mug, and flung it across the yard. 'Lapwater Hall, eh? It shan't have the name for nothing, damn you all! For water you shall drink, or nothing! Burn ye, I 'll slit the gullet of the man, woman, or child that drinks aught but water in this place! I 'll let the liquor out of 'em, damme! D' ye hear?' he roared for all to hear, dancing furiously now on the lawn before the house; 'd' ye hear? If a soul drinks my liquor, begad, I 'll take it back with a carving-knife!'

And Mr. Gil Craddock bade fair to stick to his resolve. He kept the cellar key in his own pocket. He would have no brewing on the premises, and all good drink he kept for himself, under lock and key. Moodily he nursed the affront put upon his house, and magnified it day by day. Not a rustic could show himself about the place, on whatsoever innocent errand, but drew forth Mr. Craddock with a torrent of curses and 'Hey! you want my beer, ye sodden swine, don't ye? And this here's Lapwater Hall, is it? Hey! Lapwater Hall, ye call it? Go and lap water then, you ill-got dog, lap water!'

Poor Mrs. Fidler fell off sadly, from privation of mild ale. It was a privation to which she was unused, and again and again she protested secretly to Nan Tricker it was one she wouldn't abide. Nevertheless she stayed in the service, being so far in terror of Mr. Craddock as equally to fear staying and leaving; while Amos Tricker fell into a despondency which only an Essex farm-hand deprived of beer can ever know.

It needs scarce be said that Mr. Gil Craddock made no friends, high or low. No man

inhospitable with his drink could make friends in South Essex; and so this man had no friend but his brown mare, who lapped water with content. Even now that he was so well established in the house Mr. Craddock was away from home as long as not, but for such irregular periods that the household got little relief by his absence. Still nobody could guess where he went. At times he would lock himself in a room and drink and sleep two days together; and the differing opinions of the neighbourhood merged into a steady belief that he was the Devil.

And so things went for months till a winter's night when the moon was ringed and the clouds swarmed fast across her face. All Rochford Hundred, Foulness, and Canvey lay wetter and marshier than ever; and Lapwater Hall was barred, bolted, and shuttered. Mrs. Fidler and Nan Tricker sat in the kitchen, sewing little bags in which to stuff chips from the gibbet at Hadleigh Cross: a very useful remedy for ague. Mrs. Fidler's spirits were low, for a dog had been howling wofully since nightfall, and now a huge winding-sheet was visible in the candle. But a howling dog must

rest sometimes, and a fresh draught will always cure a winding-sheet. For these reasons the troubles were lessening, when Nan's ear caught the sound of a horse's feet—feet that went with a regular break and fall that told a plain tale. The sound neared, and came in at the stableyard.

''Tis the master,' said Nan, 'and the mare 's lamed.'

She began to draw the bolts, and had scarce drawn the last when the door flew open from a kick, and Mr. Gil Craddock stood before them, haggard and miry.

'Law, sir!' said the women.

'Shut your mouths,' he answered hoarsely. 'Tear that apron and tie this arm.'

Then they saw that his right arm hung loose at his side, and blood dripped from his fingers to the floor. Mrs. Fidler, terrified, scissored the sleeve away as he directed, and wound her torn apron tightly over a wound by the elbow-joint.

Mr. Craddock took a jug of water and emptied it at one pull. 'Any more lights?' he asked, pointing to the candle.

'No, sir.'

'Dowse it. Bolt and bar, and neither stir nor breathe, or I 'll come back and twist your two necks. Say nothing, whoever comes.' And with that he went out.

The two women sat in the dark and trembled, neither daring to speak. They heard him go toward the fence at the roadside. In a few moments more they could hear him returning, this time with a quiet and stealthy step; and they clung together in a terror. Was he creeping back to murder them? No, he passed round by the back.

And now there came the noise of many horses, pounding through the mire of the road and nearing fast, till they stopped before the house with tramplings and shouts.

'House there! Hullo, hullo!' The gate slammed, and they were within the fence.

'Hullo there! Hullo!' And with that there came a great thumping at the front door. The women sat and quaked.

Many voices called without. 'Come on, come on! Why stand here?' 'Maybe they 've seen him.' 'Get away ahead!' 'Where?' 'He 's doubled.' 'Knock again, or go round. They 'll lend us fresh horses.'

The thumps on the door began afresh, and some turned into the stable-yard, shouting. Nan Tricker wept, biting hard on a thick fold of Mrs. Fidler's gown to keep back a scream.

In the midst of all the hubbub arose a cry of 'Here's the nag! He's close about!' And then a shower of blows fell on the door behind which the women cowered. 'Open the door! Open, open! In the King's name! King's officers!'

Some heavy thing was driven thrice against the door, and then with a fourth blow it crashed in, and Nan Tricker and Mrs. Fidler fell together into a corner with a dismal howl. They were dragged out, limp and hysterical, among half a dozen muddy men with steaming horses, and they wept and gasped unintelligibly.

Then the men took lights and searched high and low, in the house, the yard, and the outbuildings. For two of them were officers, and the man they sought they described as a powerfully-built fellow with a squint—Cutter Lynch, the highwayman.

So large and so daring had been his work on the great Essex Road and some others, that he had long 'weighed enough,' in the

matter of rewards, to make it worth while to raise a party to run him down. There was no other way of getting him. He worked alone and confided in nobody; he never drank while on the game; and in all things he was the most businesslike and watchful high-tobyman unhanged. The party had had the luck to flush him near Shenfield, and he had shot one man dead in the saddle before he got away across country with a bullet in his own arm. By Ingrave, Horndon, Laindon and Pitsea they had hunted him, and the brown mare must have been already well spent, or they could never have kept within hail of Cutter Lynch, who knew every dyke and fence. Down in the marshes, this side of Bemfleet, he had bogged them cleverly, and walked his nag slowly up the hill before their faces, toward a farther stretch of the road they had lately crossed, leaving them to come out as they got in; and so they followed the road and came to Lapwater Hall.

All that night lanterns flashed about the house and the land near it. In the grey of the morning the brown mare was seen shivering and whickering piteously by the pond, and

in the pond floated a hat. They took one of those great rakes called cromes, and dragged from under the culvert at the end the staring corpse of Mr. Gil Craddock.

It was there he must have hidden himself, hanging on by the broken ragstone till he fainted from the drain of blood and fell; so the officers judged, and so it was told about. As the day came and the news flew the Leigh people gathered about the pond and stared and whispered. Here was a judgment! The man was drowned in the water he had offered thirsty men when he owed them ale.

Staring thus, they found another thing floating on the water and clinging near the edge. They fished it out and turned it over in amazement, for it was a pair of horses' ears joined by a strap and fitted with a catch to hold to the headstall. They were the false ears that Brown Meg wore when Mr. Gil Craddock was Cutter Lynch, the high-tobyman!

There was the end of Mr. Gil Craddock in the body. A few months afterward, at Nan Tricker's wedding, there was a deal of rejoicing, and whatever was drunk did not come from a

pond. For it was drink of a quality so good as to give Amos Tricker an idea. He would descend into the cellars of Lapwater Hall, which stood tenantless, and would make definite investigation into the contents. But he got no farther than the cellar steps, for there, in a gloomy corner, stood the ghost of Mr. Gil Craddock, mug in hand, squinting on him and beckoning him to drink his fill of the old ale. And nothing could be juster or more likely, when it is remembered what deadly sin the highwayman had to purge, in the denial of good drink owing his fellow-man; though Amos would have none of the invitation, but ran till he fell headlong, and there slept.

And of the many witnesses, illustrious drinkers, who have seen old Gil since that time, it is said that not one has accepted his offer of drink, and so helped him to redeem his otherwise unpardonable fault. Though it is not easy to believe Essex men so implacable as that.

# THE BLACK BADGER

ROBOSHOBERY DOVE had unstrapped his wooden leg, as was his way when he sat in this place to smoke his pipe and tell me the tales of his youth. He stuck the peg into a convenient cleft on the hillside, so that the socket made a comfortable rest for his elbow, and looked out from under the brim of his glazed hat at the scene that was most familiar and grateful to his eye: the scene wherein he read the news of the outer world more readily than he could have done in any newspaper in Essex. There below lay the vast space of soft and sunny water where the Thames and the sea were one; at our feet the marshes, green like a billiard table, mapped over with the geometric lines of dikes and ditches, and seamed along the middle with that thin brown line that had wrought such little change as the countryside had known since Charles the First: the railway.

Roboshobery Dove was always an old man, in my memory, though a sturdy old fellow to the last. As I write it is some way short of twenty years since he died, yet he fought the French in a King's ship as a boy, and was never tired of saying so. He was an old man, very, when he taught me the cutlass drill and told me tales in half-holidays; and he lived to tell me many more tales in years when I was a schoolboy no longer: tales of smuggling on the Essex coast, of fights with Dutch fishermen in the lowland seas; and of Cunning Murrell, the witch-finder, he told me all that I have written and much that I can never write. And now, at the time when he told me the story that I am to tell again, he still stumped his way near and far without a totter, square and upright in his green smock, brown and hard in his face, and no more than iron-grey in the hair that curled over his earrings, though he was nearer ninety than eighty.

'Ay, ay, sir,' said the old man, 'I often wish I was young again myself, an' knew all about everything. I don't remember ever bein' particular new-fashioned, but I *was* young once, an' I knowed a deal. I

dunno a quarter so much now.' He sucked hard at his pipe, and his eyes twinkled. But, indeed, I had done no more than hint a trifle of doubt as to the value of a curious charm against rheumatism, long used by a wise woman of Foulness.

'No,' he repeated, 'not a quarter. An' I han't forgot much neither.' His glance moved about the great expanse of air, land, and water before and below him, over villages, marshes, hill-slope, and copses, and I foresaw a story. For here, spread before us, were the scenes of a hundred, told and untold, and Roboshobery Dove was but looking for an excuse or a reminder. Presently he took his pipe from his mouth and pointed. 'See there, sir,' he said; 'd'ye know the cottage down there with the roof new-tiled? Black clap-boarded cottage, onny one floor: just lookin' over that spit o' the hill, on towards Leigh.'

I saw the cottage, but knew it only because I had seen it before.

'Well, this is the second time I've seen it new-tiled; 'twere thatch when I were a lad. 'Twere there as one o' the things happened, I han't forgot—an' shan't, neither. An' a fine

young man—ay, two of 'em—larned summat fresh, young as they were; an' that were the end on 'em.' The old man stopped, and smoked in silence, waiting to be asked for the story.

So I said, 'What was it they learned?'

'They larned, sir, they larned—well you've heard tell o' Mother Lay, th' oad witch?'

'Didn't she give Cunning Murrell work a long time ago?'

'Ay, she did, sir—'fore you were born or your father either. He puzzled her once or twice, sarten to say, when he were a young man, in a comparin' way o' speakin'. But he den't hev nothen to do with this consarn. Why, oad Mother Lay—oad Nanny Lay, as most called her—she were the badger witch, as you may ha' heard. You don't chance to ha' heard o' the black badger, up at the Crown? No,—there aren't many alive to tell ye, an' if they were 'haps they wouldn't, some oad parties bein' feared o' raisin' a laugh. But I'll tell 'ee, an' ye may laugh, if ye like; I can stand it. Well, oad Dave Cloyse kep' the Crown at that time—Sim Cloyse's elder brother he were, an' dead long enough ago. Dave Cloyse, he

trapped a badger, or somebody else trapped it for him, an' he putt it in a barr'l in the yard, for to be drawed. Now there were cur'ous things about this badger, an' the fust cur'ous thing it were arl black, every bit. Never saw a black badger, did ye? No, nor nobody else as I know. Well, this badger were no sooner safe putt in the yard than a chap—Sam Prentice it was; he were young then, like me—sets his dog to draw it. It were a tough oad dog, an' had drawed many a badger; an' it were a noisy oad dog. But this time it rushes in—an' drops dead in the barr'l, without a sound. Sam, he pulled it out by the hind-quarters, but 'twere dead enough — bit hard over the neck an' dropped like you never see a badger do afore. Sam takes the oad dog round to the pump an' pumps on him, but 'twere arl for nothen—neck broke. An' when he an' Dave gets back to the barr'l the badger were gone, clean, in broad daylight! Now, sir, you know well enough no nat'ral badger 'ud leave his hole in open day, barrin' he were dragged out with main force. An' more, you 'd ha' thought somebody 'd 'a' noticed such a thing as a black badger, in the open street, in broad daylight, wouldn't ye?

But nobody did. No. But what they did see —two on 'em—were oad Nanny Lay. Oad Nanny Lay, in her big bonnet, coming out o' the Crown yard at a trot! Out o' the Crown yard she came, an' up the street, an' away!

'That were the first seen o' the black badger, but the next time meant more 'n killin' a dog. Now, at the time I 'm tellin' of—'twere 'fore I lost my leg—two brothers lived in the cottage down there we were speakin' of, with their mother. Eli Drake an' Robin Drake were their names, an' they were twins; an' twins an' all as they were, one was a preventive man—what you 'd call a coastguardsman now—an' t'other a smuggler. That sound queer in these days, but 'twere all right then, an' a very convenient arrangement when George Fourth were king. Why, the revenue cutter *Swallow* ran a cargo of its own into Wakering now an' then—ay, an' more than now an' then! Ah, them were great times—plenty o' good money an' plenty o' good drink about then! Well, Eli Drake were a preventive boatman on the Leigh station, as I 've said, an' his brother Robin were as desprit a young rip as ever handled the tubs along this here shore; and

we 've had some desprit rips, too, in my time! The chief officer had been a sleepy oad chap, doin' nothing but waiting for his sup'rannivation, an' lettin' the station go as it liked—same as most o' the preventive officers at that time. So Eli an' Robin, bedmate brothers, gives each other the fair tip when a cargo 's to be run; where the tubs 'll be, an' where the guard 'll be, an' all convenient an' comfortable; an' the chief officer, he snores asleep all night, and the guard-boatmen they pulls off the other way, and the cargo comes in fair an' easy, and goes inland on the carriers' backs, or on the pack-horses, comfortable an' straightforward as if 'twere crops off a field. As for poor oad Stagg, the ridin' officer, we den't care a stick for him. Everybody just laughed at poor oad Stagg. O' course, the preventive men, they den't lose by it; every man had his little complimentary tub, so to say, just for his own use, an' here an' there other folks had their little complimentary tub—parson had his reg'lar—an' so everybody was happy an' agreeable, which were a great deal better than rows an' disagreements among neighbours, an' fights on the marshes an' sich.

'So it all went fair an' soft, sir, as you may guess, till the oad officer got his pension and a new 'un came. He were very busy an' zealousy, were this new officer, an' people got displeased with him. He were out at all onseasonable times o' night, dodging up an' down the shore, an' dropping unexpected on any boat's crew as were layin' up quiet for a smoke or a snooze. An' he went nosing an' sniffing up an' down the place, most onneighbourly suspicious, routing about for tubs o' brandy an' gin, an' trying to make troubles an' misunderstandin's among folk as were quite agreeable to let things go on pleasant an' comfortable, just in the reg'lar oad way. So things had to be done a bit more cautious; an' the chaps took care o' their pistols an' what not when there were a run, an' young Robin Drake, he swore if the chief officer run up agin *him* when there were a job goin', he'd get a charge o' lead—an' two if one weren't enough. Desprit young rip he were.

'Now, 'fore the new officer came, most o' the stuff was took in on the straight run—just brought direct inshore an' walked off. But this wouldn't do with the new officer about; so

the next crop was sunk. You see the Marsh End Sand?'

The tide was out, and the sand lay, a brown streak, out in the winking blue water two miles from where we sat.

'Well, a shade beyond that there's the Oad Joe, a sand you onny see at bottom o' spring tides. The tubs were sunk 'twixt the two, double-anchored, on four drift-ropes, an' they were to be brote in on two seprit nights, two boatloads a night. So far settled, Eli Drake gives his brother Robin the straight tip about the guard-boat orders, an' the first night half the crop's landed neat an' handy. 'Twere along there they landed 'em, just round that spit o' the hill, where there's a fair sheltered depth for a run in. 'Twere a pretty proper night, no moon, but not so dark as could be wished—'tis mighty odd how one moonless night's a deal lighter 'n another. Everything were ready—carriers waitin' handy in a copse on the hill—an' the two boats pulls in arl they can go, loaded up. You see we never wasted no time over the dash in; soft an' cautious in the offing, if you like, but once arl's clear an' you put your nose inshore, *bang* you

go in, whip your tubs on to the carriers, an' shove away smart; an' the carriers they went off smart too, 'fore any trouble could come along.

'Well, this time the carriers was lyin' low in the copse, as I've told you. You know the copse—the farthest out bit o' copsewood anywhere along these parts. "Umf!" says one chap, sniffin' hard. "I shouldn't ha' made count there'd ha' bin a badger-earth this far out by the marshes!"

'"Umf! Umf!" sniffs his mate, "I shoon't ha' thote it, nayther! Plain enough to smell, though," says he.

'This were just as the boats were pullin' in. Robin Drake were in the first boat, an' he jumps out a'most afore she touches. But afore a soul moves in the copse, afore one o' the carriers has time as much as to straighten his legs, up jumps oad Nanny Lay in the very midst of 'em! Up she jumps, an' goes a-mincin' an' a-skippin' down to the boat, hoppin' an' dancin' with her gown held wide in her hands. The carriers arl stands fair gastered, knowin' as not a soul but 'emselves had a-laid down in that copse—a score of 'em, close as carrots.

'"Good t' ye arl," says Mother Lay, bobbin' an' caperin'. "Good t' ye arl, if ye 'll remember a poor oad woman, an' buy good luck with one little tub! One little tub o' the right liquor to warm my poor oad belly in my coad age! An' woundy good luck shall go with every man o' ye, an' wither an' blight on the King's men—for one little tub, such as ye never gave me yet, though passin' my door run arter run! One little tub for good luck!" An' she capers agen, an' jines her thumbs overhead.

'The men were dunted dumb to see her, but Robin Drake, that feared for nayther man nor devil, he cussed her and warmined her, an' made to drive her with a rope's end. "Get off, ye naggin' oad shanny," says he; "an' shut your gab 'fore ye get summut to sing for!"

'But the rest o' the men—older men, mostly —were a sight less daresome with a witch. "Shut your mouth, Rob Drake," says Stephen Allen, that was pardner in the venture, under his breath. "The run 's but begun. Don't risk the ill-tongue on the crop if a tub 'll satisfy her. See, mother," says he, "take a tub an'

get scarce with it, an' keep it out o' sight!" For there were few in these parts that dared go crossways with oad Mother Lay.

'"Thank ye, an' good luck, Master Allen," says the oad woman, bobbin' like a string-jack an' grabbin' up a tub. "An' no thanks an' no luck to them as calls me ill!" An' off she goes, a-hugging the tub afore her, up to the lane. 'Twere a fair heavy load for an oad woman like her, an' she goes slow enough; but kickin' an' liftin' her heels like jumpin' Johnson.

'The carriers stood garpin', but Rob Drake an' Stephen Allen damns 'em back to their senses, an' gets the rest o' the tubs on 'em quick enough, an' off they goes up the hill an' along the lane quiet and safe; an' so that night's run came off all right. Though there were one more cur'ous thing. Oad Nanny Leigh couldn't ha' been more 'n forty yards ahead o' the first carrier when he set off at a trot, but arl the way up an' past her cottage—a good half-mile—nayther he nor none o' the others once clapped eyes on her agen; an', true 'tis, the lane were the onny way for her to go!

'But Rob Drake were angry to have his

word overborne, an' called it sin to waste a tub on sich an' oad trollops. An' when he told his brother Eli, Eli thought so too. "I 'll surprise the oad witch," says Eli Drake, "an' the tub shan't be wasted arter all!"

'So next art'noon, towards dusk, up goes Master Eli Drake, mighty gay an' knowin', in his King's uniform, to oad Mother Lay's.

'"Good evenin' to ye, Mistress Lay," says he, standin' in the door an' lookin' round the keepin'-room. "'Tis a fine day an' looks like good harvest."

'"Ay, that it do, Master Drake," says the oad woman, lookin' at Eli a bit sideways. For there were mighty little furnitude in the place, an' she was mindful that the tub weren't so well hid as 't might be. Come to think of it, it do seem a wonderful odd thing that most o' the witches I ever heard on were so poor in clothes an' furnitude; looks as though the devil were slippery in his bargains.

'So Mother Lay she looks sideways at Eli, and Eli he grins broad an' impudent, an' steps in unasked. "'Tis a hainish unpleasant business is mine, mum," he says, grinnin' wider 'n ever, an' starin' this way and that about the

place, up an' down, an' all round. "'Tis a hainish business, but it shouldn't make neighbours bad friends. That 's a good big apron you 've throwed under the kneadin'-trough, but I seem to see the shape of a tub o' some sort under it. Sure*ly* not a tub o' white brandy? No, sure*ly* not!" An' with that he stoops an' lays hoad of it; an' oad Nanny Lay she looks at him hard an' evil.

'"Ah! but 'tis!" says Eli Drake. "A tub o' moonshine, if ever I see one. Sorry to disappoint ye, mum; but 'tis my duty to seize this here tub." An' he heaves it up on his shoulder, grinning an' winking.

'"Take care, Eli Drake," says oad Mother Lay, lookin' more evil and dangerous than ever. "Take care how ye cross me!"

'Eli Drake laughs outright at her now, an' for a moment the oad woman changed her tune. "Ah, Master Drake," says she, "'tis pleasant of ye to make your joke, but people might see the tub from the lane. Putt it down, now, there 's a deary, an' we 'll hev a glass together. Come, 'taren't neighbourlike to carry a joke too far!"

'Eli only walks out with the tub on his

shoulder, laughin' fit to crack. "I count I can carry it about as far as Leigh," says he. "At any rate, don't worry—I 'll do my endeavour!"

'"Now don't 'ee be so hard on a poor lone woman," says the oad witch, pleadin' an' beggin'. "'Tis ill for a fine King's officer like you to take away the little drop o' comfort from a poor oad widder, Master Drake. 'Tis sarten you don't mean it. Master Drake, do 'ee let be!"

'Eli Drake cut her short 'twixt laughin' an' swearin'. "Let go o' my coat," he says, "an' take it lucky 'taint in my convenience to walk you off too!" Because o' course he never meant carryin' the tub farther than his own house.

'When she saw nothin' 'ud change him, she let go all an' cursed. "I warned 'ee, Eli Drake," she screamed: "I warned 'ee an' ye wouldn't listen. I begged 'ee an' ye laughed at me. Listen or laugh, laugh or listen, you 'll rue this minute when 'tis too late! You 'll rue this minute on earth above an' in hell fire below! Go home, go home, Eli Drake; go home laughin' with your stolen tub; go home to your bed an' make the most o' this night's

rest, for your next will be a bitter one! I 'll putt upon ye heavier an' sooner than ye know —you an' your twin brother too, that tried to rob me first!"

'Eli Drake laughed till the tub jiggled on his shoulder, as he walked down the lane. An' oad Nanny's voice followed him out o' sight.

'"Go on, go on!" she says, "yow han't far to travel. What I can't do myself I can putt it on others to do! Make the most o' your time, you an' your brother both!"

'Robin laughed as much as Eli when he heard the tale, an' they both sat down to stick a gimlet in the tub and drink luck to the next run. Only their mother fared uneasy. "You shouldn't ha' done it, Eli," says she; "'twill lead to trouble, sarten. Take it back now, and call it all a joke, do! Take it back, an some other little thing with it, to pacify her!"

'But the boys only laughed again, an' poured her out a glass of brandy-an'-water, which she wouldn't take. She were a little, quiet woman, were Mrs. Drake, far unlike her sons, though they fared mighty fond of her, both of 'em. But as for givin' heed to what she said—not them.

'The two brothers went to bed together merry enough that night, after they'd unplugged the gimlet-holes more than once, an' more than twice. Eli was off guard for the night, and the two slep' sound and heavy. But their mother was wakeful. Mighty still it is o' quiet nights down on the marshes, as you know, an' she, lyin' awake with her window open, for 'twere summer weather, might ha' heard the grass growin', pretty nigh. She lay awake and uneasy; an' in the black of the night there came a sound of something scuffling past very quiet outside. 'Twere no human thing, surely, an' nothen on four feet that she could fix on as very likely; not the dog, for he were chained behind in the yard, nor the cat, nor a rabbit, for neither scuffled that way. 'Tis likely she never thought of a badger.

'She lay an' listened, an' heard the thing go brushin' along as far as t' other bedroom window, where her sons were, an' there it stopped. An' at that the dog behind woke an' began sniffin' an' whinin' an' shakin' his chain.

'Barrin' the dog, she heard no more for a good while, an' then 'twas somebody walkin' about in her sons' bedroom. At this she got

up an' went out an' along to their door. 'Twere not loud footsteps, an' she guessed it were either Robin or Eli on his bare feet. So she called. The footfalls stopped, but there was no word of answer. So she called again, an' made to open the door. Now that door, sir, was just on a common latch, no more; such as you lift with a finger. The latch lifted easy enough, but the door might ha' been nailed for all it 'ud budge, top, bottom, or side.

'Mrs. Drake thumped an' called. "Robin!" she called. "Eli! Be you sleep-walkin'? Why d'ye hold the door?"

'There came not a sound but the footfalls again. They went across the room an' stopped; and then the bed creaked an' bumped, an' all were quiet.

"Mrs. Drake made no doubt but that one o' the two had got up asleep an' putt the chest o' drawers across the door. So she went back to her room, meanin' to slip on a shawl an' a pair o' shoes, an' go and look in at the other bedroom window. She'd scarce got to her door but something made her change her mind, an' she ran back to call louder an' push

harder. An', behold you! no sooner was her hand on the latch than the door opened, free an' easy. The door opened, an' there, on the casement-sill opposite, was a black shadowy something that turned its head, with a long sharp snout. It turned its head an' then bundled out o' window neck an' crop, scratchin' down the ivy an' scufflin' off over the garden; an' the dog outside jumps wild on his chain, and howls like Bedlam.

'Mrs. Drake was near to drop with fright, but she ran across an' banged the casement, an' catched it. An' then she smelt, an' the place was full of what the carriers had sniffed in the copse the night afore—the stink of a badger.

'"Robin! Eli! Wake up! Are ye well, my boys?" she called; an' shook the nearest by the shoulder.

'He was heavy in sleep, an' 'twas a moment or two 'fore he woke enough to grunt an' wonder. He was all right, 'twould seem, an' so was t'other; an' they scarce said it but they were fast asleep again. They hadn't tapped the tub for nothing, them jolly twins.

'Their mother was thankful to find 'em

unhurt, but she was frighted an' bemazed at the whole thing. She could only hope that the thing on the sill had been no farther; though she was sore troubled an' distressed. So she dressed herself, an' walked about the rest of the night, an' sat, an' worried, an' peeped into the young fellows' bedroom every now an' then. There was no more to disturb her, 'cept that at first, as she began dressing, she heard a queer sort o' snarling bark two or three times outside the garden fence. She guessed it to be a stray dog, or a fox, though the noise were far unlike either. That was because she den't know the voice of a badger; few do, for 'tis a silent beast, mostly.

'In the morning Robin an' Eli rose up dry an' sick an' surly. Bad heads an' bad mouths they 'd both on 'em got. Sarten to say they 'd had a good few turns at the brandy tub, but it had never served 'em so before, such purely good stuff as 'twas. They snapped an' snarled at one another every turn.

'"Pah!" says Robin. "Place smells like a sty. Couldn't 'ee leave the window open, same as I set it?"

'"Leave the window open?" says Eli. "I did. Ye shut it yourself, dang 'ee."

'"An' who's a-been at my pistols?" says Robin. "I left 'em in the drawer, an' here they're atop o' the chest. Loaded, too! I'd a-swore I drawed the charges yesterday. Seems you've been a-sleep-walkin'!"

'"Sleep-walkin' yourself!" growls Eli. "I han't touched your pistols. Pity you can't hold a drop o' liquor like a man. Ugh!"

'He puffs and spurts with his dry mouth, an' presently draws out from his lips two stiff black hairs. "What's this?" he says. "Mouth like a mortar-mill, hair an' all. An' on the bed, too; stinkin' black hair, like a polecat's. What sort o' brute ha' ye been harbourin' in here, ye drunken lump?'

'So 'twent till they were nigh at blows, them two brothers as had never quarrelled in their lives afore. An' they were as short an' snarly with their mother, too, an' would listen to nothing she had to say about the affairs o' the night; till the poor woman went away an' cried. An' the fear was on her, hard an' heavy an' black; for she knew that oad Nanny Lay had been with 'em in the night, an' these

were no more her sons as she 'd known 'em, but men bewitched.

'So the two brothers went about growling an' snapping an' scowling, an' sometimes almost fighting. But most of the day they kept apart. Now, the night to come was app'inted for running the rest of the tubs o' brandy. There had to go a night between, 'cause the carriers wouldn't work two nights together; an' they 'd be little good for smart work if they would, for need of sleep. 'Twere Eli's turn for night guard, an' as he were going out, says Robin: "The rest o' the crop 's comin' in to-night. How about time?"

'"Time yourself!" says Eli, an' swears. "Time yourself, an' go about your smugglin' your own way. I 'm a King's man, I am!" An' he slouched off, black as thunder.

'"King's man!" shouts Robin. "I 'll give ye King's man, ye sulky brute!" An' he 'd ha' rushed after Eli to strike him, but his mother held him back, an' prevented him. He pushed her away, swore worse than Eli, an' presently went off on his business. An' his mother sat at home, an' cried again.

'Well, that night the boats pulled off, an'

lifted the rest o' the crop o' tubs all fair an' easy, without a kink. 'Twere a good night for the job, moonless an' cloudy, an' darker than the first night. Robin Drake gave little thought to his brother's talk, knowing well enough the reg'lar rounds o' the preventive boats. The carriers were all in to time, waiting in the copse, just as before. All being clear, as far as could be guessed, in came the boats, over the Marsh End Sand, hard as men could pull. In they came, an' Robin Drake an' Stephen Allen had a pair o' tubs on the first carrier almost as soon as they 'd touched bottom. The carriers swarmed round, the boats were half unloaded, and some o' the men were getting off, when——

'"*Halt, there!*" comes a roar from the hill-spit behind the copse. "Stand, every man o' you, in the king's name!"

'An' Lord! there were the preventive men almost round 'em a'ready! An' more than the Leigh boatmen, too—a lot from a cutter.

'Then there was the biggest fanteeg an' hullabaloo an' general Dovercourt ever heard along this coast. The new chief officer came tearin' an' swearin' down with his whinger in

his hand, callin' to his men to seize every man of 'em. One or two o' the carriers hulled down their tubs an' ran, others ran an' took the tubs with 'em. Some o' the boatmen, hemmed in, tried to make a bit of a stand, reckonin' on the preventive men favourin' 'em and giving 'em a chance of a bolt, an' others made a move to shove off the boats. An' slap in the thick of it all came a pistol-shot that made most of 'em jump where they stood; and then another.

'The two shots were close in the same spot, it seemed, though there were a few moments between 'em. Who had fired nobody knew. The chief officer promised a deal to the smuggler found with a smoky pistol, but pretty soon them as could had got away; but most were took, and most o' the tubs. . . .

'Well, when it came to lookin' over, it was seen that Eli Drake was missing; an' 'twas an hour 'fore they found him. Find him they did at last, however, after the prisoners had been marched off, an' they found him by help of a lantern that one or two were using as were left to search for dropped tubs. An' they found his brother Robin with him. It

was in a little hollow below the copse, an' there the twin brothers were lying, one a-top o' the other, dead an' bloody. They turned 'em over, an' their faces were set like the faces o' two fightin' dogs.

'Shot they were, both of 'em, Robin through the head, an' Eli through the chest, and shot at kissing distance; for Eli's coat was scorched as big as a crown piece, an' Robin's temple was black, where any temple was left. But both the fired pistols were Robin's.

'Now, 'twas plain enough that Robin had shot Eli, but nobody could ever tell which o' the two had shot Robin. Whether Eli snatched his other pistol in the struggle, or whether the spell lifted from Robin when he saw he 'd shot his own brother an' he put the second pistol to his own head, nobody ever knew; nor ever will, not in the world we 're sittin' in.

'They carried them along up the lane where oad Nanny Lay had carried her tub two nights back, lighting their way with the lanterns. An', believe me, sir—or believe the men as saw it, rather—all the way up there went a black creature before 'em on its hind legs,

bobbin' an' caperin' an' turnin' its head, with a long sharp snout! Ay, till they were like to drop the bodies an' run, very nigh, sir, though there were seven of 'em together.'

'Shadows from the lanterns, probably,' I suggested; for I was young, and doubtless too pert with my elders.

'No doubt, sir,' said Roboshobery Dove, drily, 'since you say so. But not havin' been there myself I didn't contradict them as was. However, nobody hereabout saw much more o' Mother Lay.'

'Did she die?' I asked.

'That I won't say, sir, but leave it to your opinion. There was a great noisin' about o' the matter next day, as you may guess, an' towards late in the afternoon things grew so that a gang started up from Leigh to drag oad Nanny Lay out an' swim her, or worse. They were a woundy rough lot in Leigh at that time, an' there's no tellin' what they might ha' done if they'd found her. But she was gone, an' nothing left in the cottage but what wouldn't go in a bundle or so.

'They buried the brothers in the far corner of Hadleigh Churchyard—just beyond where

I showed you so many of Cunning Murrell's children were. There the two lay together, as they 'd lain in their cradle, an' in their bed, an' as they lay at last under the hill, by the marshes.

'Well, sir, they 'd been in two nights when oad Bill Prentice, the sexton—Sam Prentice's father—comin' into the churchyard late, saw something. He saw something dark creepin' by the new grave, almost under his feet. What it was struck his mind in a flash, an' he chopped down on it with the edge of his spade, an' chopped again an' again, mad strong and chokin' with fright; an' the thing shrieked, sir—shrieked like a woman! An' he chopped an' chopped an' chopped till he fainted dead away; an' there they found him, with the Black Badger lying by, chopped an' mangled an' dead, but plain to tell for the same badger Dan Cloyse had trapped.

'The grave lay a bit high, with a little bank down to the fence by the lane, like as you know; an' in the mornin' 'twas plain to see where the creature had come from, for there on the side of the bank was new-dug earth, an' that earth burrowed straight down into the

grave. And in the burrow, sir, in the hole, when they broke it open an' raked it——'

Roboshobery Dove bent across and whispered the last grisly words of his tale: words I would rather not write.

# THE TORN HEART

## I

IT is a most notorious fact that on Christmas Day the power of all witchcraft withers to naught; charms and spells turn to empty sounds; imps and familiars cease to walk the earth; their evil works are cut short at the stroke of midnight on Christmas Eve, and resume no more till the next midnight strikes. Thinking again, I may be disposed to admit that perhaps the fact is less notorious now and here than it was in Essex in the first half of the last century, when Cunning Murrell guarded that lusty county against the powers of darkness, and when the fact I have mentioned was very notorious indeed, and so were a hundred other facts of the same sort.

There was a Christmas Eve in those times when winter had begun in a fickle, shifty fashion that sadly bothered all living things. There had been a frost or two toward the

end of November, and then a spell of warm weather—really warm weather, that brought out primroses everywhere, while here and there a monthly rose, recovering from its late discouragement, struggled into blossom again; and the birds, after a little puzzled hesitation, took spring for granted and set to work to keep abreast of the times. Then in the middle of December there came another nip of frost, and again fine weather; so that neither birds nor flowers could guess what to be at; till at last the matter was settled by a light fall of snow two days from Christmas, with a hard frost quick upon it.

On the afternoon of that Christmas Eve, Leigh church door stood sometimes shut and sometimes open, for the church was being decked with holly and bay, and though the party within were apt to push close the door at an incoming draught, still there were goings and comings, and there were moments when light was wanted just within. Standing by the porch under the dial, one might look out over the tumbled old red roofs of Leigh, and so across the great estuary of the Thames, wide and silver-grey for miles, till

one could say no more whether he were looking on salt sea or on winter sky, except where a duller line of grey declared the place of the Kentish hills. Nearer, and to the right, lay the dun marshes; and Canvey Island stretched beyond them, flat and dull, like dead weed on the water.

The light began to fail, and all the greys and browns to draw together in a universal dusk, save here on the hills and among the roofs below, where little drifts and settlements of snow lingered in rifts and crannies. Within the old church it grew wholly dark, and the last few branches were set in place by the light from a tin lantern which had been provided by the forethought of Abel Robgent—a forethought which he was at great pains to expound, now that it had been justified by the event.

'Ah!' said Abel sagaciously, a dozen times to every living soul in the church, 'Ah! I knowed it! "'Twill be past blind man's holiday 'fore we're done," says I, "an' I'll hev the lantern." "No," says Tom Bundock, "'taren't needful." But yow den't know, Tom, an' I did!'

Abel Robgent's lantern went at last bobbing and smelling down the aisle, casting random patches of light now on the tall pews, now on the faces of his companions; anon waking the glints of holly and bay-leaf over their heads, and at last flinging a ray across the ancient alms-box by the door, and calling into sight its sprawled lettering, 'I PRAYE YOV THE PORE REMEMBER.'

And so the party found themselves in the dusk without. Far away in the midst of the great blank that was sky and sea, the Nore light was twinkling, and there was a light in more than one window down the hillside. Joanna Bell was of the party, with others who sang in the choir—Nat Prentice, in particular, as well as Tom Bundock and 'Tilda Coates, and several more. It had been matter of great interest during the afternoon to observe that something seemed to have gone awry between Joanna Bell and Nat Prentice, promised lovers as they were known to be. For Joanna had been seen to turn away, with elaborate and stately care, from any part of the church in which Nat was busy. It was noticed also that if Joanna needed help to reach beyond

stretch of her own finger-tips, or to cut a stout branch, it was to Tom Bundock she turned, and that with a look and a smile, as the observers judged, more than adequate to so casual an occasion. The female observers, that is to say; for in these matters the men are dull dogs, and it is doubtful if one among them—except Tom Bundock himself—were aware of what was matter of great interest among the girls. Even Nat Prentice, they perceived, took the thing with surprising coolness; and, indeed, if the kindness—tenderness, the spiteful might say—of 'Tilda Coates could console him, then he had consolation in plenty.

Was it a break-off, or nothing but a chance tiff? Some judged the question answered by what they saw at the churchyard gate. There Joanna lingered a moment to gaze, as it seemed, across the sea at the Nore Light; but when Nat Prentice came briskly up the path toward her she brought herself back quickly enough to immediate concerns, and turned away with a lift of the head and a jerk of the shoulder not to be mistaken.

Nat stood for a moment as she sailed off

into Chess Lane, and then took his way downhill alone: not alone for long, however, for it was seen that he and 'Tilda Coates turned into the street below together.

Nor did Joanna long walk unattended. She trod Chess Lane with a valiant smile about her little mouth, but with a strange, full glint in her eyes. Thirty yards she had gone along the narrow path, when she turned at a quick footfall behind her. It was Tom Bundock, made bold by an afternoon of especial favour.

'Ha! I den't guess yow'd go Chess Lane way,' grinned Tom Bundock.

'Well, and what then?'

Tom Bundock's grin narrowed, and his eyes widened. For the girl's voice was nothing less than savage, and her face made such a contrast with the countenance that had been so often turned on him that afternoon that poor Tom, never quick-witted, was reduced to a gape and a stammer.

'I—I—just thote I'd step along homeways with 'ee,' he said at last.

'Then you won't; so go back!'

Tom stood blinking, and she stamped impatiently. 'Go back, I say!' she repeated.

'Or, if this is your way, then go on alone and leave me. Go on—one way or the other!'

Tom Bundock rubbed his glazed hat back and forth on his head, and lurched aside with a rudimentary effort at an independent flourish.

'Ho, ho! Arl right,' he said with a glance first down the lane, then up, and then behind again. 'Arl right; I'm agoin' fast enough!' And he lurched and clumped away back toward the church, his hands in his pockets.

Joanna watched him go, and then resumed her walk. Chess Lane was a narrow path bordering the edge of the hills, with the Rectory grounds on one side and the drop to Leigh and the sea on the other. It is gone now,—the Rectory garden swallowed it long ago—but in those times it was a favourite walk, being kept hard and clean with crushed cockle-shell, and having a bench or two beneath the overhanging trees. Joanna found it empty, however, at this time and season, as was to be expected. She walked another thirty yards, with fire in her eyes, and no smile; and then she flung down on a bench and burst into a fit of crying.

It was cruel—it was wicked of Nat to behave so. Why didn't he come after her, as that fool Tom Bundock had done? Why didn't he come after her and beg forgiveness, and make it up? As to what he was to beg forgiveness for, that was a detail she did not stay to consider, for she had trouble enough as it was. Nat had turned his back on her—or at least he had not seemed to mind when she turned hers on him, which was very much the same thing. And then that fat, ugly, designing 'Tilda Coates! . . . Here Joanna's passion did injustice to 'Tilda Coates, who, whatever she may have had of designs—and of reasonable plumpness—was not ugly.

As for herself, Joanna, what had she done to merit all this bitterness? Nothing at all. When she had essayed to give proof and flavour to her dominion over Nat Prentice by the natural process—offering him cause for jealousy—his jealousy had refused to be roused; or at any rate he would not let it be seen, which was even more annoying, because perverse. This had been some days ago, and since then she had gone further—who could

help it? If only he had grown visibly angry it would have been something, but it would seem that a pointed slight merely cooled him. Thus she had driven him farther and farther from her, and now she could find no way to bring him back. To-day she had even gone so far as to prefer that stupid lout Tom Bundock, and if that would not reach Nat, what could be done with such a man? Though indeed what she had done was little more than sheer self-defence, with 'Tilda Coates going on so. And poor Joanna's sobs broke out afresh.

She had made almost sure of him, at the churchyard gate. She had stood looking out over the sea to give him a chance of coming up with her. Of course, when he came, she had turned away from him—that was the proper thing, after what had occurred; and she had walked across to Chess Lane, instead of taking her usual way down Church Hill, so that he might be observed to follow humbly after her, full in the public eye. But he had done nothing of the sort; he had openly and shamelessly disregarded her, and it was not Nat but Tom Bundock who had come clumping along the cliff at her heels. It was wicked

and cruel, and so she sat and cried herself quiet again.

With her quietness came a little sober thought. What should be done? What could be done except—yes, there *was* an expedient. Joanna sat up and wiped her eyes, and gazed out into the far darkness. All the weapons in her own armoury were used and blunted, but—there was Cunning Murrell.

The cunning man was the common refuge of all whose troubles had grown beyond their management. Joanna's own mother, now lying in the churchyard she had just left behind her, had been cured of a 'sending,' which involved sores on the leg, by the skill of Murrell. A cow bewitched or a man or woman 'overlooked'—any such task was easy play to Cunning Murrell, as was likewise the cure of agues or fits; and as for charms to bring back a straying lover—why, Essex was alive with just such lovers, brought to heel and safely married by the arts of the wise man. He was not only doctor for beast and man, but the hammer and scourge of all witches, and in that matter a needful blessing enough; for there were witches, and would be, in Leigh for a

hundred years to come; three there would be in Hadleigh for ever, and as many as nine in Canewdon. This thing could not be doubted, for Cunning Murrell had said it himself.

The thought brought a flash of light into Joanna's mind. There was the explanation—the unimpeachable explanation. 'Tilda Coates had trafficked with a witch, and was drawing away Nat Prentice with a love-charm! Most surely that was the truth, for what other explanation could answer the circumstances?

That was enough. For a witch's work all remedy lay with Cunning Murrell. Joanna rose, put away her handkerchief and went on her way at a quicker pace. At the top of a path leading down the hill she paused a moment, with a doubt whether or not to go home first. But that might hinder her enterprise, and at any rate there was the old housekeeper to tend her father if he needed it. So she passed the turning and hurried on through the Tikle Field, beyond the Rectory grounds, over the stile, and so out toward Lapwater Hall and the road to Hadleigh.

Lapwater Hall was a place to be passed after dark at a run, with the face averted, by

one who knew the tale of the ghost, as Joanna did; but beyond that no more than brisk walking was needed. The whole walk, first to last, was two miles; and then, in a clump of trees, Joanna found the beginning of Hadleigh village, and Murrell's cottage hard by.

It was one of a row in the lane to the left that led down to the Castle and the marshes below it. Joanna's steps slackened as she neared the little black house, and soon they stopped; for now she realised that to make a resolve to consult the cunning man was one thing, and easy; while to knock boldly at his door and pour her troubles in his ear was another, and harder. She turned and shrank into the shadow of a tree that overhung a fence on the opposite side of the lane.

A light burned in Murrell's keeping-room, and the blind of the little window was fringed with the shadows of the herbs that hung within. It would seem that the wise man was at home; but to venture into his house and there to tell that strange old man all the tale of her baffled coquetry—that seemed a venture beyond Joanna's courage. She turned her money over in her pocket, and wondered if

it were enough; and she thought of forcing herself into the business by a rush across the lane and a thump at the door which would take her into the middle of things willy-nilly. But no; she could not do it. If only Murrell had been a woman!

As the wish crossed her mind the little door opened, and there, indeed, a woman stood, with Cunning Murrell lighting her out. The sharp-faced little old man carried a candle, which he shaded with the disengaged hand; and by its light Joanna saw the girl on the step, and knew her face. It was 'Tilda Coates!

Murrell's client bade him good night and vanished in the dark of the lane; Murrell himself retreated and closed the door; and Joanna Bell was left amazed.

Here was 'Tilda Coates's abettor, then—Cunning Murrell! Here was the secret spring of the whole trouble—'Tilda Coates had got her charm of Murrell himself; and now, there could be no doubt, had come up by the shorter way over the hill-slopes to renew and confirm it for the dance to-night at Pettles's, at Tarpots Hall.

Murrell's aid, then, was out of the question ; it was enlisted on the side of the enemy. And against Murrell what could avail ?

But perhaps—perhaps. . . . The charm might be well enough, but might not 'Tilda Coates herself be vulnerable ? Joanna grew the more dangerous as she saw her case the more desperate.

## II

It was no inconsiderable part of Joanna's affliction that she could not go to the dance at Tarpots Hall that night. It was not for lack of invitation, but because Nat had said that he was going before she had announced her own decision in the matter. This left her no choice but to reply that she should stay away. Of course that only meant that she must be entreated, that Nat should be submissive and disconsolate, and so forth ; thereupon she would have graciously relented, and all would have been well. But no—there was no doing anything with Nat : he would *not* see it.

And it was not to be a common dance in a cleared barn either, for Tarpots Hall had a fine great parlour. Indeed, the place had been

something more than a mere farmhouse once, and Mrs. Pettles, the farmer's wife, was persistent—even heroic—in maintaining the name Tarpots Hall intact, in face of a scandalous general tendency to shorten it to mere 'Tarpots.' And at Tarpots Hall everybody—everybody worth mentioning—would be dancing to-night, except Joanna Bell. Truly, Joanna's cup of bitterness was running over.

Back to Leigh she went by the way that 'Tilda Coates had come. It was, indeed, the shorter way, when one remembered that the wet places on the lower slopes were now frozen hard. But it was a dark and broken path, and needed knowledge; also Joanna had no desire just now for the company of 'Tilda Coates, who was picking her own way no great distance ahead. So that the shorter journey advantaged Joanna very little, and the clock at the stairfoot struck seven as she lifted the latch of her father's house in Leigh Strand.

It was a gabled structure of timber and plaster, with a garden about and behind it, which climbed some part of the hill-slope. In the keeping-room the old skipper sat propped among pillows in a chair, with rheumatism for

his main interest in life, and, as a consequence, with little either of ability or inclination to interfere in his daughter's concerns.

This evening he observed nothing unusual in Joanna, such being the blindness of man and the absorbency of rheumatism, and he scarcely troubled even to comment on her lateness for tea. He took it for granted that she would leave again in an hour or two for Tarpots Hall, since—very naturally—she had told him nothing of her difficulties and misfortunes: troubles which would have been beyond the old sailor's comprehension. And when, indeed, she did leave a little before nine, he thought nothing of the fact that she went straight from her bed-room to the street, calling her good-night from the front door, beyond a vague guess that she must be in a hurry, and a listless wonder that Nat Prentice had not called. In fine, he had been accustomed all his life to let the women-kind have their way unquestioned in the house, just as he had always made sure of his own way aboard his schooner.

But Joanna's reason for not showing herself to her father was simply that even he must have noticed that she was wearing her ordinary

workaday clothes under her cloak and hood, and might have asked questions which she would have preferred not to answer. Nevertheless, it was toward Tarpots Hall that she first turned her steps; but that was mainly because the house was on the way to another place.

She went a circuit to avoid observation, leaving the village by its western end, mounting to the Tikle Field, and thence skirting Leigh with a wide sweep. So she came to Tarpots Hall, where it stood on the high ground, with its lighted windows looking out over the marshes and toward the sea.

In the east over the sea and the Nore the rising moon lined the clouds with hazy light; and the snowdrifts on the hills, the trees skirting the fields inland, and the barns and fences about the farmhouse, took form but slowly out of the gloom. Joanna had thought to skirt the farm as she had skirted the village, but—the parlour lights shone red through the drawn curtains, and human nature was not to be denied. Fiddles were going apace in the house and feet were stamping, but without not a living soul was visible. Joanna climbed a gate into the hoppit

and stole across to the nearest red-curtained window.

A drawn curtain is well enough, but it is odds a peep-corner is left somewhere, and Joanna was quick enough to find one now. There was nothing to see but what anybody would expect who had heard laughter, stamping, and the scream of fiddles: lads and lasses all arow, up to sixty years of age and beyond, ranged on both sides of the long parlour, and Abel Robgent and Nancy Fisk coming down the middle; after them, Sim Cloyse and Ruth Becker; and after them again—Nat Prentice and 'Tilda Coates.

It was not a great matter, of course, and in truth it was what she had climbed the gate to see; but it was more than enough to confirm Joanna in her errand. She hurried away with bitter hate in her soul, and the whining fiddles jeered her as she went.

A mile beyond Tarpots Hall there is a fold in the hills which makes an easier way up from the marshes, and up this way a broken foot-track straggles. On a side of the great furrow, near the top, and on the edge of a little wood, there stood at this time

a very small old cottage—one might say a hut—clap-boarded and very ill-thatched. This was the goal of Joanna's journey, and the home of old Sukey Black, a character of no great favour hereabouts.

She lived alone; gathered her fuel in the wood close by, or in any place where it might be found; did a little field work, though not much; and eked out by begging such trifles as she might need—an egg or two, a jug of skim-milk, barn-sweepings to feed the half-dozen lank fowls that roosted on sticks behind the hut—things that few cared to refuse her, since they cost little or nothing, and might avert a greater loss. For, indeed, it was held a bad thing to 'go crossways' with Sukey Black; you must speak her civil, also, and cover your thumbs with your fingers as you did it: sure guard against a witch.

And it was to Sukey Black that Joanna was coming, since Murrell was impossible. A feebler aid, no doubt; but a very cunning woman.

Joanna crossed the combe and neared Sukey Black's door—moving with no hesitation now. She took one look about her, and then,

with just a moment's effort, rapped at the door.

For some little while there was no answer, and she rapped again. Then she started violently at the sudden appearance of Sukey Black's face at the little window close by her shoulder.

Her first impulse was to run. But then the latch clicked and the door opened. Sukey Black stood on the threshold in an odd huddle of old clothes, for she had been roused from bed. She was bent and brown and large-featured, and it was plain to see, even in the dim moonlight, that there was some remnant of old gypsy blood in Sukey Black.

'It fare late, my dearie,' said the old woman, 'for yow to come a-wisitin' to me. But love 'll send a maid a far journey, even o' Christmas Eve. Do I know 'ee, dearie? Your hood be drawed that close——'

The old woman leaned and peered, gripping under her chin the shawl that covered her head. 'Why,' she went on, 'ben't it Cap'en Bell's darter, o' Leigh—Miss Joanna? Yes—I see 'ee now, my dearie. Come you in.'

Sukey Black's tongue did not always run so

pleasantly, but to-night she scented profit. No girl would come at this time of this cold night from Leigh for nothing; indeed, there could be scarcely more than one sort of trouble that would send her, as Sukey had hinted in her first greeting.

She knelt and blew on the embers of the wood fire, throwing on more twigs till the flames crackled up and lit the room fitfully.

'An' what be't to-night, dearie?' the old woman asked presently. 'Love'll drive a maid a far journey. Do he give 'ee pain, dearie?'

Sukey Black could talk with a tender croon that would draw the confidence of the timidest girl, and in three minutes Joanna was sobbing out the poor little sorrows that were so great, and the wise old woman knew more of them than she herself ever guessed.

'Help me, Mrs. Black,' Joanna entreated; 'do help me. I den't know I loved him so till now—I den't! An' I've been a fool an' lost him! Give me something to bring him back!'

'But the other gal,' old Sukey said, warily; 'she 've been to Cunnin' Murr'll for that same thing, as yow do tell. I dussen't go crossways

with Cunnin' Murr'll!' She shook her head and screwed her wrinkled mouth. 'No, no! I coon't do it, sarten to say! An' do it or no, 'twould do no good—not agen Cunnin' Murr'll!'

'But is there no other way? I can't lose Nat! Isn't there something?'

The wrinkled old mouth screwed and worked amain, and the deep-set old eyes looked furtively in Joanna's face.

'Ay,' said Sukey Black. ''Tis arl a chance there be one thing. But 'tis different.'

'Tell me—what?'

'Yow might putt summat on the gal.'

Joanna caught her breath. 'Not—not to kill her?' she whispered.

The old woman shook her head. 'Not if yow den't want. But to torment her most hainish, an' drive her, an' tear her heart away from him. If ye 'll do it. Will ye do it? 'Tis for yow to say an' for yow to do, when I tell 'ee how. Will 'ee do it?'

Joanna paused a moment, while something that checked her utterance turned over in her throat and subsided. Then she said, 'Yes, I 'll do it.'

Why not? Was she not suffering torments herself? Had not Nat been torn away from her? Indeed she would do it, whatever it was.

'Then ye shall, dearie. But 'tis a doubt if 'ee can do 't till after to-morrow. 'Tis no good after twelve to-night, for 'twill be Christmas Day.'

'What must I do?'

'What will 'ee give me if I tell 'ee, dearie? Will 'ee make it five shillun, now?'

'I 'll give you ten if only it will do it. It 's all I 've got with me.'

'Good go with 'ee, my dearie, an' ye 'll never lose by it. An' ye won't tell, will 'ee? Nobody? 'Tis for your use, an' it fare hard to be ill-tret for a witch. 'Tis for yow an' your heart's delight, I tell 'ee. An' ye 'll never tell? They 'll call 'ee witch, too, if 'ee do.'

'No, of course I 'll never tell—for my own sake, as well as yours. Now what is it?'

The old woman pulled a little roll of red cloth from under her bed, and a pair of scissors. 'First,' she said, 'tell me her name.'

''Tilda Coates.'

''Tilda Coates, eh? Matilda Coates, to be true to name. Can 'ee write it on paper?'

'Yes, but—but—my handwriting——'

''Tis no matter—I burn it.'

Joanna took the scrap of paper offered her, and wrote the name.

'Ye han't e'er a bit of her hair, dearie? No? Then 'tis no matter, I can do well with anoather thing I hev. And now see——' Sukey Black opened the door and pointed. 'Yow see that bush? 'Tis wild brier. Break seven thorns from that—seven big thorns from low on the stem, and bring them here.'

The moon was now up, and its light waxed and waned as the little clouds crowded across its face. The brier stood twenty yards away, and Joanna fetched the seven thorns as she was bid. When she regained the hut it was plain that the old witch had been at work in her absence. There was a smell as of burning leather or hair, and in her hand Sukey held a piece of red cloth, neatly cut in the shape of a heart, and smeared with a cross of ashes.

'Take it in hand, dearie,' said the old woman; whispering now, and continuing to whisper to the end. 'Take it in hand, and drive in one thorn, countin' one. Then another, an' count two; an' a third, countin' still,

an' so till the seven are all driven in. This is the beginnin' o' the torment. Do 'ee know where she be?'

'Yes—at Tarpots Hall.' Joanna also whispered now, though she could never have told why.

'The nearer it be the stronger the spell an' the heavier the torment. Take now to the thorns again. Pull out the first, an' drive it in again, sayin' "M" for the first letter o' the name, and so through the name to the end. An' when the name be finished 'twill be on the last thorn but one. Then begin the name again on the last thorn and spell through again an' again, never missin' a thorn till yow come even once more, and drive the last thorn with the last letter. An' then yow must count again. So the torment increases. An' the nearer, the more hainish. An' it may be if it goes near enough an' sharp an' terr'ble enough, she 'll be drawed forth in her agony an' torment to try and take the heart from 'ee; an' 'tis then 'ee must tear the heart—tear it strong an' quick from top to bottom at a rent, an' all 's your own, dearie—all 's your own then. But ye must do it before midnight, for then all

spells come to nought, an' needs ye must wait over the day. An' now go, dearie, an' luck go with 'ee!'

The whisper ceased, and Joanna stood without, stabbing the heart with thorns. Over the broken ground she went, under the clearing moon, toward Tarpots Hall, counting and spelling, and stabbing unceasingly. She stumbled among stones and holes and in furze-bushes, but she never fell, and she never broke her task. The night froze hard, but the sweat beaded and ran on her face as she went, bedevilled, doing the Fiend's work for love, and stabbing the heart with thorns.

So she neared the place of the dance, walking ever with an exaltation that was strangely like terror, counting and stabbing. Till at last she sank behind a furze-bush near the house, with her eyes fixed now on the lighted windows as she stabbed and spelt on, mechanically. So she crouched for some minutes, never ceasing her spell; till she saw something that struck her dumb and motionless.

For out from the house came a figure in white, walking toward her, its hand upon its

breast. On it came, steady and straight, the hand clutching the breast as a suffering woman's hand will; and Joanna knew this for her enemy. The girl's face was drawn with her pain, and as she neared and neared, Joanna gripped tight on the heart with both hands, till her body was like stone, and her soul was filled with an unspeakable horror. So 'Tilda Coates came and came, and at last stood over her, and their eyes met; and at that, with one bursting effort and a loud scream, Joanna tore the heart asunder. There was a sound in her ears as of a crash of thunder, and she knew no more.

. . . . .

When once more her eyes were opened they gazed into other eyes close above them—and the eyes were Nat's! Could it be real? Was it a dream—heaven—what? Nat held her in his arms—kissed her; and there was music—singing.

*Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,*
*Born is the King of Israel!*

The moon was overhead still, wading in the mottled clouds. 'Nat,' she said, 'is it you? What is this?'

'Christmas morning,' said Nat, 'this very minute, pretty near. But what are ye doing out here like this? Did you hear the gun? Oad Cap'en Jollyfax fired the brass swivel at twelve exact, to start the carollers, he said. Hear 'em now. But you've had a turn—what brought you out here?'

Joanna looked about her, and saw that the party from Tarpots Hall were standing in a gaping ring about them. She whispered: 'I'll tell you, Nat—another time. Forgive me, Nat.'

Here the carollers over by the house broke into a merrier song—

*To-morrow shall be my dancing day,*
*I would my true love may so chance*
*To hear me sing from far away*
*To call my true love to my dance.*
*Sing oh! My love, oh!*
*My love, my love, my love!*
*And this have I done for my true love!*

*In manger laid and wrapped He was,*
*So very poor His lowly chance——*

It was Christmas indeed, and now Joanna cared no more that her spell was broken, for

Cunning Murrell's charm was gone with it, and Nat was her own again.

. . . . .

And so in truth it was, for Nat Prentice and 'Tilda Coates were never seen to walk together down nor up Church Hill again. Further, for such as are curious in these matters, it may be said as a fact that, in the midst of the dancing at Tarpots Hall that night, at about the time that Joanna left Mother Black's, 'Tilda Coates was taken with pains at the heart and faintness, and that at last she was driven to walk out of doors in hope of relief in the fresh air. There she was most indubitably startled by a figure that rose screaming in the furze-bushes, ran back terrified just as old Captain Jollyfax fired the brass gun, and forgot her pains forthwith.

But of course there were wild tales. As, for instance, that the faintness and the spasms at the heart were nothing new with her, and that, in fact, all she had of Cunning Murrell was physic for those same troubles; and the wilder tale of some scoffer, that she suffered that night less from the malady than from the physic, and took no more of it. Such random talk

met with the neglect it deserved, and cast not a shadow on the indefeasible truth established anew by Joanna's adventure: that no charm or spell can survive the stroke of twelve that proclaims Christmas Day, even though it be the work of so powerful and so white a witch as Cunning Murrell himself.

THE END

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NOVEMBER 1905

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